

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fifth session
22 February – 4 March 2011

Interactive dialogue

“Elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child”

Friday, 25 February 2011, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

ISSUES PAPER

I. Introduction

The Commission on the Status of Women, at its fifty-fifth session (22 February–4 March 2011), will evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on the “Elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child”, adopted by the Commission at its fifty-first session in 2007, through an interactive dialogue among Member States and observers. This review is designed to identify achievements, lessons learned, gaps and challenges encountered. It is expected that the dialogue will highlight good practices and strategies for further and accelerated implementation of the agreed conclusions. The outcome of the review will be a Moderator’s summary of the dialogue.

II. Background

The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted in 1995, included the girl child as one of its 12 critical areas of concern and outlined strategies for achieving the elimination of discrimination and violence against girls. The Commission on the Status of Women¹ and the General Assembly² have continued to build on the Platform for Action and have strengthened the international policy framework. They have further emphasized the need to address all forms of violence against girls in different settings and situations; improve girls’ access to basic services, including with regard to education and health; and ensure that girls can express themselves and participate in decision-making processes.

All major human rights treaties include a provision confirming the principle of non-discrimination and equality between men and women, including girls. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child provide the most comprehensive legal protection for the girl child. The human rights treaty bodies monitoring implementation of these treaties address the

¹ See Commission on the Status of Women 2007 agreed conclusions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child women (E/CN.6/2007/9), and the Commission’s resolutions on women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS (resolutions 50/2, 51/1, 52/4, 53/2, 54/2), on ending female genital mutilation (resolutions 51/2, 52/2, 54/7) and on forced marriage of the girl child (resolution 51/3).

² See General Assembly resolutions 60/141, 62/140 and 64/145 on the girl child, and 61/144, 63/156 and 65/190 on trafficking in women and girls.

situation of the girl child in their constructive dialogue with States parties, concluding observations, and general recommendations/comments.

In its 2007 agreed conclusions on the elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child, the Commission on the Status of Women expressed concern that, despite progress in addressing all forms of discrimination and violence against girls and recognition of their rights, discrimination and violations of their human rights persisted and that the girl child did not receive sufficiently explicit attention in policy and programme development and resource allocation. The Commission recognized that the empowerment of girls was key to breaking the cycle of violence and discrimination against them. The agreed conclusions called on Governments to enhance norms and policies, and in particular to:

- consider ratifying as a matter of priority human rights treaties and implement them fully;
- review and, where appropriate, revise, amend or abolish all laws, regulations, policies, practices and customs that discriminate against women or the girl child or have a discriminatory impact on women and the girl child;
- condemn all forms of discrimination and violence against girls, and enact and/or strengthen legislation on preventing and eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against girls;
- develop policies and programmes to sensitize magistrates, judges, lawyers, prosecutors and persons who work with victims, in order to ensure that judicial proceedings are adequate to the needs and the development of the girl child;
- exercise due diligence to prevent all forms of violence against girls, and investigate and punish the perpetrators of such violence and provide protection to the victims;
- give explicit attention to the girl child in budget processes at all levels.

The agreed conclusions urged Governments and the relevant entities of the United Nations system, and invited the international financial institutions and civil society to carry out a range of measures in the following areas: poverty, education and training, gender stereotypes, health, HIV/AIDS, child labour, armed conflict, humanitarian assistance to girls, violence and discrimination, trafficking, girls in high-risk situations, migration, empowering girls, participation of girls, gender mainstreaming, and data collection.

Stronger legislative and policy frameworks are increasingly in place to uphold children's rights, including girls, and better respond to their needs³. However, in general few frameworks specifically address the situation of girls. The girl child does not yet receive sufficient attention in policy and programme development and resource allocation, and girls have little opportunity to participate in the development of public policy.

³ The fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action identified a number of trends in national-level implementation of the critical area of concern on the girl child, remaining gaps and challenges, and recommended further actions. See E/CN.6/2010/2.

Governments are increasingly adopting laws and policies to address the multiple forms of violence against girls, including female genital mutilation/cutting, early and forced marriage, and human trafficking. Many States are conducting awareness-raising campaigns against violence against children. Support and services for child victims of violence are increasingly in place. Efforts are also being made to strengthen data collection and research, including general studies on violence against women or children, and studies on different forms of violence against girls as well as violence in specific contexts, such as educational settings. Despite these developments, girls remain particularly vulnerable to different forms of violence, including in the home, the community, educational institutions, and in conflict and post-conflict situations.

The global commitments to achieving universal primary education and gender parity in primary and secondary education have had a beneficial impact on girls' enrolment and retention rates in many countries. However, girls continue to face significant barriers in access to education, including as a result of gender stereotypes, the allocation of domestic work and caregiving responsibilities primarily to girls, and resource constraints. Some 69 million children of primary school age were still out of school in 2008, and of these, some 53 per cent were girls.⁴

Girls continue to have insufficient access to health services and information, including sexual and reproductive health. There has been some progress in reducing the numbers of teenage pregnancies, as a result of family planning programmes and education campaigns on the use of contraceptives, but the adolescent birth rate remains high in some regions. HIV transmission is linked to gender, sexual behaviour and discrimination and these factors make women and girls more vulnerable to the virus and its impacts. Of 5.5 million young people living with HIV between the ages of 15 and 24 years in 2007, 3.4 million were female.⁵ Many States have integrated gender perspectives into their national HIV/AIDS strategies, but budgetary allocations devoted to HIV-related programmes for women and girls remain insufficient.

The persistence of attitudes and behaviour based on gender stereotypes continues to reinforce gender inequalities and negatively affects girls' self-esteem, opportunities and exercise of their rights. Efforts are being made to foster the changing of attitudes. States have addressed gender stereotypes in and through the educational system, including revisions to school curricula to remove gender biases, integrating discussion of girls' and women's rights into courses, and teacher trainings. Awareness-raising and other initiatives to promote non-discriminatory attitudes and behaviour towards girls are also being carried out.

Child labour, especially domestic but also agricultural work, continues to affect many girls. These girls are often exposed to long working hours and abuse, and are denied their rights, including their right to education.

⁴ Report of the Secretary-General on follow up to the special session of the General Assembly on children (A/65/226), para.44.

⁵ Report of the Secretary-General on the girl child (A/64/315), para. 49.

The lack of reliable data, disaggregated by sex, age and other relevant factors, in particular in relation to girls affected by armed conflict, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, human trafficking and child labour, is a continuing constraint to formulating and implementing effective and targeted policies and programmes, as well as to monitoring progress in the elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child. Increased research and data collection on the situation of girls is needed, including to assess and monitor the impact of measures taken.

III. Format of the interactive dialogue

The interactive dialogue will be introduced by a keynote speaker who will make a presentation of fifteen minutes intended to stimulate interactive dialogue among participants. In addition to the keynote speaker, two girls/young women will speak about experiences at the country-level and provide case studies and good practice examples in follow up to the agreed conclusions. Member States, entities of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations will participate in the ensuing dialogue, and are encouraged to share their experiences in implementing the agreed conclusions, highlighting achievements, gaps and challenges, as well as good practices and lessons learned. Interventions from the floor will be limited to three minutes. A Chairperson's summary of the interactive dialogue will be prepared.

IV. Issues for consideration

During the inter-active dialogue among States and observers, participants will focus on lessons learned, challenges and good practices, and identify means to accelerate implementation. They will focus on national and regional activities in support of the implementation of the agreed conclusions, and will provide supporting data, statistics and other quantitative and qualitative information to illustrate monitoring and reporting.

The following questions provide a non-exhaustive discussion guide:

- What measures have been taken to eliminate discrimination and violence against the girl child following the adoption of the agreed conclusions? What was their impact, and how has their effectiveness been monitored?
- What strategies have proven to be effective to ensure the girl child receives sufficient attention in policy and programme development and resource allocation? How can those be expanded and replicated for greater impact?
- What constraints and challenges have been identified in addressing discrimination and violence against girls? How can those constraints and challenges be addressed?
- How has implementation of international human rights instruments, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, contributed to enhanced

- What steps and measures have been taken to empower girls to participate as active partners in decision-making processes? How can those be strengthened?