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Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-third Session
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**WOMEN'S COMMISSION ENDS SESSION, CALLS FOR SHARED
RESPONSIBILITY FOR CAREGIVING BETWEEN MEN, WOMEN IN CONTEXT
OF HIV/AIDS, REDUCING CARE BURDEN ON HOUSEHOLDS**

Approves Several Texts, Including on Working Group on Communications, Assistance to Palestinian Women, Commission Themes for 2010-2014 Period

To a burst of applause, the Commission on the Status of Women concluded its fifty-third session this evening with the adoption of hard-won agreed conclusions on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS -- its priority theme -- and several resolutions on women's empowerment.

The principal output of the Commission on the Status of Women is the agreed conclusions on priority themes set for each year. They contain an analysis of the priority theme and recommendations for Governments, intergovernmental bodies and other institutions, civil society actors and other relevant stakeholders, to be implemented at the international, national, regional and local level.

In protracted debate over those conclusions, delegations lamented that they made no reference to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, or more generally to women living under occupation. Some said they needed more time to review the document, as there was only one person in their delegation. Others pointed out that their concerns had not been taken into account at all.

Nevertheless, consensus was reached and the Commission, in the agreed conclusions, urged Governments, along with the United Nations, civil society and the private sector, among others, to intensify efforts to fully implement the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, a landmark agenda for removing obstacles to women's participation in all spheres of public and private life. It also urged them to mainstream gender perspectives into all legislation, policies and programmes, and incorporate a gender-responsive budgeting process across all policy areas.

On the specific issue of caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS, the conclusions called for scaling up efforts significantly to achieve universal access to comprehensive prevention programmes, treatment, care and support by 2010. They recognized the increased feminization of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the need to review existing HIV/AIDS policies to ensure that they reduce women's vulnerability to the disease. They also highlighted the need to improve -- and promote -- the accessibility of quality public health-care services, and design programmes that encourage men's responsibility for home-based care.

In other areas, the conclusions called on Governments to incorporate the value and cost of unpaid work to society in policies, strategies and budgets across relevant sectors; ensure that women and men have access to maternity and paternity leave; increase access to public infrastructure, such as transportation, to reduce the care burden on households; develop

strategies to eliminate gender stereotypes; collect sex-disaggregated data to inform policymaking; adopt measures to overcome the negative impacts of the economic and financial crisis; and allocate financial resources at the international level for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, among other instruments.

Adopting a draft resolution on women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS, the Commission urged Governments to create an enabling environment for women's empowerment, strengthen their economic independence and inheritance and property rights, promote their human rights and strengthen health care and services, including for sexual and reproductive health, to better protect them from HIV infection. It also urged Governments and all relevant stakeholders to help women better access HIV prevention and treatment, and care for others infected with the disease, while addressing the situation of girls forced to drop out of school to care as a result.

Further to that text, Governments were urged to strengthen legal, policy, administrative and other measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls as an integral part of national HIV/AIDS response, institute and enforce laws to protect them from early and forced marriage and marital rape, and ensure their sustained access to HIV/AIDS treatment. Governments were called upon to intensify efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls in relation to HIV/AIDS, to integrate HIV prevention, voluntary counselling and testing into other health services and to rapidly scale up treatment programmes to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Governments and the international donor community were also called upon to ensure adequate funding for national HIV/AIDS programmes.

At the same time, the Commission requested that the Secretariat, co-sponsors of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and other United Nations agencies responding to the pandemic to mainstream a gender and human rights perspective throughout their HIV and AIDS-related operations. It encouraged the design and implementation of programmes, including in awareness-raising, to encourage and enable men to adopt safe, non-coercive and responsible sexual and reproductive behaviour.

In other action, the Commission recommended that the Economic and Social Council adopt various resolutions, one of which focused on Palestinian women. Approved by a recorded vote of 30 in favour to 3 against (Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States), with 8 abstentions (Germany, Belgium, Cameroon, Croatia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden), the text urged the international community to give special attention to the human rights of Palestinian women and girls, and intensify work to improve their conditions. It called for the urgent provision assistance to alleviate the dire humanitarian crisis. (For details of the vote, please see annex).

Speaking in general statement before the vote, the representative of Israel said the draft conveniently omitted all references to " Hamas " and " terrorists ". Without incorporating the reality of Palestinian terrorism, the draft was inadequate and misleading, and only prolonged women's suffering on all sides. The resolution had no place in the Commission, and she called on members to reject " this annual ritual ".

Speaking after the vote, the representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine said the text was relevant to the principles of the Commission, and it was the right of any delegation to bring issues to the body. Palestinian women had lived under occupation for nearly four decades, and they merited the Commission's consideration. She looked forward

to the day when such resolutions did not have to be put forward. Until that time, her delegation would continue to look to the United Nations as the protector of those most in need.

Some other delegates objected to the resolution, saying that country-specific matters should not be taken up by the Commission, as they fell outside its purview.

The Commission approved without a vote as orally revised a resolution on the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, by which it recommended that the Economic and Social Council stress the importance of voluntary financial contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund for the Institute and call for the diversification of funding resources.

Also without a vote, the Commission approved an orally revised resolution of Vice-Chairperson Julio Peralta of Paraguay, which outlined the themes for the Commission's 2010-2014 period. At its fifty-fourth session in 2010, it would review implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals.

In another text approved without a vote, the Commission decided to recommend, through the Economic and Social Council, that the General Assembly hold a commemorative meeting during the Commission's session in March 2010 to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing documents.

By a further text, the Commission decided to begin its fifty-fourth session by appointing members of its Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women for a two-year period, in order to make communications procedures more efficient and effective.

In keeping with an earlier decision (2002/235) to appoint, at each session, the members of the Working Group for the next session to enable the issuance of their report three working days before the adoption of the agenda by the Commission, the Commission earlier today named Hoh Sang-Wook (Asian States Group), to the Working Group on Communications for the fifty-fourth session. It decided that the appointment of the Group's remaining members would be deferred to the fifty-fourth session next year. The Commission also took note of the Working Group's report and decided to include it in its report.

In other matters, the Commission took note of the Moderator's summary of the high-level round table on "Equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS".

It also took note of summaries of its five panel discussions, namely: "key policy initiatives on equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS"; "capacity-building for mainstreaming a gender perspective into national policies and programmes to support the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including in the context of HIV/AIDS"; "the gender perspectives of the financial crisis"; "equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels"; and "implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health: a gender perspective".

The Chairperson noted that the Commission had held a lively and positive joint panel with the Statistical Commission on indicators on violence against women. He said important work

had already been undertaken on that topic. An expert group meeting had been organized last October and a report had been made available. He welcomed the intention of the Statistical Commission to pursue that work further and its decision to set up a working group on indicators on violence against women, in response to General Assembly resolutions 61/143 (2006) and 62/133 (2007), on intensifying efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women. In that regard, he read out a letter from Pali Lehohla, Statistician-General of Statistics of South Africa, who also served as the Chairperson of Statistical Commission.

Further, the Commission took note of the several reports of the Secretary-General, including on equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS; on proposals for a multi-year programme of work for the period 2010-2014 of the Commission on the Status of Women; on progress in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development, implementation and evaluation of national policies and programmes, with a particular focus on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS; and on the joint work plan of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. It also took note of the report transmitted through a note of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) concerning the activities of the Fund to eliminate violence against women, as well as a note of the Secretariat on implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health.

The Commission adopted the report of its fifty-third session, which was introduced by Vice-Chairperson and Rapporteur, Cecile Mballa Eyenga (Cameroon), as well as the provisional agenda for its fifty-fourth session.

Immediately following the closure of its fifty-third session, the Commission opened its fifty-fourth session to elect its Bureau. By acclamation, it elected Armen Martirosyan (Armenia) of the Eastern European Group of States as the Chairperson for both the fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth sessions. It also elected as Vice-Chairpersons Leysa Sow (Senegal) of the African States Group; Roberto Storaci (Italy) of the Western European and other States Group; and Takashi Ashiki (Japan) of the Asian States Group. The Commission agreed that, upon nomination of a candidate by the Latin American and Caribbean States Group, it would elect that candidate post-facto at its second meeting.

Background

The Commission on the Status of Women met today to conclude its fifty-third session on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

Introduction of Draft Resolutions

Speaking on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, MOHAMED ALI SAEED (Sudan) introduced a draft resolution entitled Future operation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (document /CN.6/2009/L.1), by which the Commission would recommend that the Economic and Social Council stress the critical importance of voluntary financial contributions to the Institute, and call for the diversification of funding resources.

He said collaboration among various agencies had produced a strategic framework, which expanded the Institute's research in several areas to a wider scope of countries. That framework had been instrumental in resource mobilization efforts. Operative paragraph 5 of the draft highlighted the appointment of a new Institute Director as a matter of priority. He looked forward to the Commission's consensus approval of the draft.

Introducing a draft resolution, also to be recommended to the Economic and Social Council, entitled Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (document /CN.6/2009/L.2/Rev.1), he said the continuing difficulties faced by Palestinian women and the need to provide them with assistance was central to the draft. The text expressed concern about Palestinian women and reaffirmed that Israeli occupation remained an obstacle to their development.

MANTO TSHABALALA-MSIMANG, Minister in the Presidency of South Africa, speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), introduced a draft resolution for the Commission's adoption on women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS (document E/CN.6/2009/L.8), saying that efforts to combat HIV/AIDS was a priority for the Community's agenda. Her delegation was concerned that the pandemic disproportionately affected women and girls, as their vulnerability was increased by their unequal economic and social status. She hoped that the resolution would be adopted by consensus.

Statement

The Commission then reopened its general discussion to allow a minister from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who had not been able to travel to New York earlier, to make a statement.

MARIE-ANGE LUKIANA MUFWANKOL, Minister of Gender, Women and Children's Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, said her country was strongly committed to the concept of women in leadership positions to combat the scourge of HIV/AIDS and to end violence against women and girls in armed conflict, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had broken through the wall of silence and were now speaking about the crimes committed against them in the Great Lakes region, including rape as method of war, which had left many women and girls infected with HIV. Those horrors were perpetrated mainly in the eastern part of the country, but had spread to mining zones, as well. They had led to devastating consequences at the economic, social, psychological and cultural level, which must be combated. The situation in the region had been disastrous. Genocidal practices had crossed borders and struck the peaceful population in the country. Over 15 years, the conflict had left 5 million people dead and 2 million people displaced. The country's institutions had been weakened by war.

She said President Joseph Kabila had launched a multisectoral programme to combat HIV/AIDS. It had set up a fund for women's advancement and the protection of children, and an agency to fight sexual violence, as well as a programme to end impunity, and a National Rehabilitation Council for Women and Girls. Women had already lobbied for action in that regard, participating in a march, the first of its kind, which had brought together more than 200,000 women. In their "I Denounce" declaration, Congolese women spoke out against HIV/AIDS, sexual violence and women's exploitation. The United Nations system, particularly the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

(UNAIDS), in cooperation with international non-governmental organizations, had provided humanitarian assistance. But that help was barely enough.

It was necessary to strengthen international synergy, consolidate peace and ensure political independence by fully eradicating the armed gangs in the country, as called for by the international community, particularly the Security Council. The humanitarian corridor in the region had been exploited and used as a corridor of death and looting. The international community's efforts to consolidate peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the wider region were laudable, but they must continue and be strengthened. Continued international solidarity was necessary to address the devastating impact on the Congolese population of the 1994 "holocaust", in which Rwandans fleeing genocide at home had sought refuge in her country.

She called for an international emergency reconstruction plan similar to the Marshall Plan for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and international support to promote democracy there and elsewhere in the region. She added that her Government had the political will to support the equal sharing of responsibility between women and men in caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS.

Action on Drafts

The Commission first turned its attention to a draft resolution on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women (document E/CN.6/2009/L.6).

Speaking before action on that text, the representative of Paraguay thanked all who had participated in informal consultations, and said operative paragraph 2 would be deleted.

The Commission then approved the draft for adoption by the Economic and Social Council, as orally amended.

Also acting without a vote, it approved, also for adoption by the Council, the draft resolution on the Future operation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, as orally revised (document E/CN.6/2009/L.1).

The Commission deferred action on the draft resolution entitled Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (document E/CN.6/2009/L.2/Rev.1) until this afternoon to allow for further consultations among delegations.

Next, the Commission adopted without a vote as orally revised a resolution of the Commission on Preparations for the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (document E/CN.6/2009/L.4).

The Commission then turned to a draft resolution on Women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS (document E/CN.6/2009/L.8).

Speaking before action on that draft, the representative of South Africa noted that there had been consultations on the draft this morning, and she detailed several oral amendments to the text.

The Commission then adopted the text without a vote, as orally revised.

Speaking after action, the representative of Sweden, speaking on behalf of the European Union, said her delegation placed high priority on HIV/AIDS. This year, the Union was disappointed that the agreed language from previous years had been changed at a very late stage. As a result, co-sponsors and other delegations had been given only hours to consider amendments, which had merited more time.

Also speaking after action, Chile's representative said her delegation would have liked to see updated language. She hoped that future resolutions on the subject would refer to commitments made for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. She also noted commitments made by civil society and the private sector to eliminate the serious HIV/AIDS scourge.

Also acting without a vote, the Commission then recommended for adoption by the Council a draft on the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women of the Commission on the Status of Women (document E/CN.6/2009/L.7), which had been submitted by Vice-Chairperson Enna Park (Republic of Korea).

The Commission deferred to the afternoon session action on the agreed conclusions on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving, in the context of HIV/AIDS, contained in an informal paper that had been circulated, to allow for further consultations among delegations.

Turning its attention this afternoon to the appointment of members of the Working Group on Communications, the Commission named HOH SANG-WOOK (Asian States Group) to the Working Group for the fifty-fourth session. It decided that the appointment of the Group's remaining members would be deferred to the fifty-fourth session next year, with the understanding that upon nomination by their respective regional groups, nominees would be permitted to participate fully in the proceedings of the Working Group when it convened earlier in 2010, in February.

The Commission then began its consideration of the resolution on the Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (document E/CN.6/2009/L.2/Rev.1).

Speaking before action on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, the representative of Sudan said he hoped all would vote in favour of the resolution. He also asked who had requested the recorded vote.

The Chairman responded that the United States had requested the vote.

In a general statement, the representative of Israel said the draft should not be under consideration, as it was one-sided. Other forums were more appropriate for the issue. Besides, the draft conveniently omitted all references to " Hamas " and " terrorists ". Clearly, the challenges facing Palestinian women were significant, but without incorporating the reality of Palestinian terrorism, the draft was inadequate and misleading, and only prolonged women's suffering on all sides. The reality was that Palestinian civilians continued to be used as pawns by Hamas. If it was the wish of the Commission to examine reality in the region, the text should recognize challenges faced by Israeli women and the impact on them of Palestinian terrorism. The resolution had no place in the Commission, and she called on members to reject " this annual ritual ".

Speaking in explanation of position, the representative of the United States said her delegation had come to the meeting with a message of change. Sadly, on this resolution,

instead of change, the Commission had been presented with an "unbalanced" statement. The United States was deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and would continue to provide assistance to the Palestinians, including through budget support for the Palestinian Authority. The United States was the largest bilateral donor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and contributed a significant amount to other organizations serving Palestinian women.

Vigorous American engagement could support the parties as they took the necessary risks to create peace, she said. The United States supported a two-State solution. The Quartet was the most effective instrument for affecting the international community's engagement to bring lasting peace to the Middle East. She sought actions that contributed to progress, rather than politicizing resolutions. The resolution sought to politicize the Commission and was inconsistent with the universal principles of the Commission. The United States would vote against it.

The Commission then approved the resolution on assistance to Palestinian women by a recorded vote of 30 in favour to 3 against (Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States), with 8 abstentions (Germany, Belgium, Cameroon, Croatia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden). (For details of the vote, see Annex)

Speaking in explanation of vote after the vote, the representative of the United Kingdom said it was forced to vote against the resolution. For some years, the United Kingdom had voiced its concern about several aspects of the resolution and the fact that it was being tabled by Commission. It should be taken up by the General Assembly. The resolution was too overtly political in its treatment of the issue. The United Kingdom's vote should not be interpreted as showing disregard for the plight of Palestinian women; it was deeply concerned by the scale and duration of suffering of Palestinian women exacerbated by the Palestinian conflict. During the 2007 Paris Donor Conference, the United Kingdom had pledged 243 million pounds over the next three years for the Palestinian Authority, and it had pledged millions more for the Palestinians in the wake of the Gaza conflict. Other women in the region, including Israeli women, also suffered while the Middle East conflict persisted.

Spain's representative said resolutions of the Security Council attributed a greater role for Palestinian women in decision-making during times of conflicts, in order to ensure they were on the same legal footing as men.

Spain had abstained from the vote, because, while the general aspect of Palestinian women in terms of their legal situation should be discussed by the Commission, matters of a political nature should be handled by the Assembly's Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization).

The Netherlands' representative said he had voted against the text because he believed country-specific resolutions did not belong in the Commission. Last year, the Netherlands had abstained during voting on the resolution, but it had voted against it this year to make its point clear.

Japan's representative expressed hope that the international community would improve the situation of Palestinian women. But the resolution could have been modified to be more balanced and acceptable to a wider range of States. That was why Japan had abstained during the vote. Japan was committed to helping the Palestinian people. It had pledged \$200 million during the Gaza Conference in Egypt on 2 March, in addition to its regular funding for the Palestinians.

The representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine thanked all delegations that had voted in favour of the resolution. As in the past, deliberations were aimed at securing the broadest support, and she deeply regretted that some delegations had not voted positively. The text was relevant to the principles of the Commission, and it was the right of any delegation to bring issues to the body. Palestinian women had lived under occupation for nearly four decades and they merited the Commission's consideration. Throughout the discussions, her delegation had displayed flexibility, while others had failed to look into the substance or merit of the resolution at hand.

She said the adoption of the text came at a time when Palestinians continued to suffer throughout the entire Occupied Palestinian Territory. The situation was particularly serious in the Gaza Strip, where, in just 22 days, more than 1,300 Palestinians had been killed by Israel. It was "shocking and tragic" that more than one third of those people had been children. It was preposterous that a Stateless people who were looking to the international community for support were criticized for doing so by Member States. One State had tried to encourage others to adopt its illegal positions. She looked forward to the day that Palestinians would not have to put forward such resolutions. Until that time, her delegation would continue to look to the United Nations as the protector of those most in need.

ANNEX

Vote on Assistance to Palestinian Women

The draft resolution on Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (document E/CN.6/09/L.2/Rev.1) was approved by a recorded vote of 30 in favour to 3 against, with 8 abstentions, as follows:

In favour: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Brazil, China, Cuba, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Eritrea, Gabon, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Iran, Lesotho, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Qatar, Russian Federation, Senegal, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia.

Against: Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States.

Abstain: Belgium, Cameroon, Croatia, Germany, Japan, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden.

Absent: Belize, Cambodia, Mali, Togo