



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
15 December 2008

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-third session

2-13 March 2009

Item 3 (a) (i) of the provisional agenda*

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS

Statement submitted by Amnesty International, Femmes Afrique Solidarité, Human Rights Watch, International Alert and Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2009/1.

Statement*

On behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security we welcome the decision of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women to review, at its fifty-third session, progress towards “Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels.”

The NGO Working Group is a coalition of international civil society organizations,¹ that formed in 2000 to advocate for a United Nations Security Council resolution on women, peace and security. We now advocate for full and effective implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) on Women, Peace and Security, and for the particular concerns of women in conflict-affected situations to be addressed consistently and substantively by the United Nations system and by Member States.

At its fiftieth session in 2006, the Commission on the Status of Women stressed the need to increase women’s role in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict rebuilding of society, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325, and underlined the link between increasing women’s participation in decision-making and ending violence against women. The Commission concluded by urging Governments, the United Nations system and others to, *inter alia*, strengthen research, monitoring and evaluation of the progress of women’s participation in decision-making; introduce objective and transparent procedures for recruitment and gender-sensitive career planning; take measures to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women; and promote women’s leadership in all areas and at all levels.

In recent years, there has been considerably more discussion about the protection and promotion of women’s human rights in conflict-affected situations, with many new actors positively engaged in driving this agenda forward. Concrete results remain very inconsistent however, particularly with regard to women’s participation in peace processes, United Nations leadership positions, national justice systems, and programmes for the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR) of women and men associated with fighting forces.

With regard to peace processes, the United Nations Development Fund for Women reported to the Security Council in October 2008 that since 2000, women averaged only 7% of negotiators in five major United Nations peace processes. In addition, fewer than 3% of the signatories in 14 peace talks have been women.

The NGO Working Group urges the Commission to stress that mediators, negotiators and donors assisting peace processes must take further, measurable action to eliminate the obstacles

* Issued without formal editing.

¹ The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security comprises: Amnesty International, Boston Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights, Femmes Africa Solidarité, Global Action to Prevent War, Global Justice Center, Hague Appeal for Peace, Human Rights Watch, International Action Network on Small Arms, International Alert, International Women’s Tribune Centre, Women’s Action for New Directions, Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

that prevent women from bringing their valuable contributions to peace processes. This requires very practical support, such as the provision of transportation, personal security, and care for family members, so that women representatives are able to get to the negotiation table. On a systemic level, women's meaningful participation in peace processes also requires renewed efforts to empower women through training, and access to education, employment and health-care services.

There have been some important United Nations initiatives, such as in northern Uganda, to support women's participation. However, such United Nations support needs to be systematic and integrated into all aspects of peace processes. The United Nations Department of Political Affairs is a key player in such processes, but the lack of a well-funded Gender Unit in that Department is limiting. The NGO Working Group therefore urges the Commission and Member States to give effect to repeated suggestion of the Security Council and others that such a Gender Unit be created. The NGO Working Group also urges the Commission and Member States to actively support the creation of a well-resourced women-specific United Nations entity, led by an Under Secretary-General, and with the necessary capacity and presence to effectively drive, monitor and evaluate women's equal participation in decision-making at all levels.

As regards women's equal participation within United Nations system itself, the new appointments of women as Special Representatives (SRSG) and Deputy Special Representatives (DSRSG) to the Secretary-General are encouraging. Since 2006, these appointments include: SRSG Ellen Margrethe Løj and DSRSG Henrietta Joy Abena Nyarko Mensa-Bonsu for Liberia; DSRSG Leila Zerrougui for the Democratic Republic of Congo; and DSRSG Rima Salah for the Central African Republic and Chad. Women nevertheless remain dramatically under-represented in the United Nations 30 peacekeeping and political missions and must be appointed to more leadership positions. National-level reforms are essential to enable more women to obtain positions in United Nations missions, and a transparent and accountable process must be established for Member States to submit names of women candidates to the Secretary-General for appointments to high-level posts.

As the Commission noted in 2006, women's equal participation in decision-making processes can help to decrease sexual and gender-based violence. The NGO Working Group is concerned however that the stigmatization, threats and intimidation associated with women who have experienced such violence, often discourages them from political participation. The Commission should therefore continue to stress the critical need for more women in the judiciary and legal professions in conflict-affected situations. Further measures to eliminate barriers to women's and girls' education and to promote women's access to legal training, for example, will help to increase women's access to justice, end impunity for crimes of sexual and gender-based violence, and reduce some of the risks that women face when striving for equal political participation.

Women continue to be excluded from policy-setting on conflict transformation, such as rule of law and justice sector reform. Women and girls for example who play a significant role in some

fighting forces, should appropriately be targeted and benefit from relevant post-conflict programs. The United Nations' Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards of 2006 provide useful guidance on how to build gender-responsive approaches into DDR programs. This includes the essential participation of women in the design, implementation and evaluation of such programmes to ensure their effectiveness. The Commission should encourage the United Nations system and Member States to consistently implement these new standards and make sure that women are part of wider post-conflict disarmament processes, once DDR programs have ended.

Eight years on from the landmark adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and women are impatient to see new and concrete results before its tenth anniversary in 2010. The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security therefore urges the Commission on the Status of Women to use its review of progress on the "equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels" effectively. This includes garnering essential support for a well-funded Gender Unit in the Department of Political Affairs, the appointment of more women to senior United Nations leadership positions, and the consistent and full implementation of United Nations' Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards relating to women associated with fighting forces. These recommendations are critical elements to realizing women's right to equal participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding and other decision-making processes.
