

9 March 2004

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Forty-eighth session

1-12 March 2004

Agenda item 3 (c) (i)

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled

“Women 2000: gender equality, development and -ec 2000: W-08W5.0412.171p7d -91(m611.322y.323(f.041i1p5r1p7t c1p7) in achieving gender equality

Panel discussion on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality

Summary submitted by the moderator

1. At its 5th meeting, on 2 March 2004, the Commission on the Status of Women held a panel discussion followed by a dialogue on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality. The panellists were: Robert Connell (Australia), Professor of Education at the University of Sydney; Jorge Lyra (Brazil), co-founder and Manager of the Institute PAPAI; Njoki Wainaina (Kenya), freelance consultant and co-founder of the Network of African Men against Gender-based Violence; and Bertil Lindblad, Deputy Director of the Office of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS in New York.

2. Participants agreed that men and boys had an important role in empowering women and achieving gender equality in the home, the community, the labour market and the workplace. Many men and boys were already supporting the promotion of gender equality and the advancement of women, and were agents of change for a more gender-equal society. However, both direct and indirect factors hindered men's involvement on a large scale. While direct obstacles included gender-biased legislation and policies, such as those that denied men the right to paternity leave and opportunities to care for other family members, indirect factors included gender stereotypes and negative attitudes and behaviour. It was therefore crucial to create an enabling environment with proactive public policy to facilitate the sharing of power and of responsibilities at the family and community levels. Broader institutional changes were also required to enable men's and women's

8. Participants emphasized that gender inequality was one of the root causes of the spread of HIV/AIDS and contributed to women's and girls' increased vulnerability to the epidemic. Globally, there were more women and girls infected with HIV every year than men and boys. Many interventions on HIV/AIDS had failed to address the unequal power relations between men and women that often led to women's inability to protect themselves against the epidemic. While most of the attention so far had been on women's vulnerability, the role of men and boys in preventing the spread of HIV was increasingly acknowledged. There was a need to increase men's and boys' awareness of the consequences of irresponsible sexual behaviour.

9. Participants agreed that men and women had a shared responsibility to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Gender equality and greater responsibility for sexual and reproductive behaviour could be achieved by fostering partnerships between women and men. Men and boys could become agents of change in HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention, and care and support. The promotion of women's property and inheritance rights was likewise important. Women and girls were traditionally involved in home-based care and support of HIV/AIDS victims with the devastating result that girls dropped out of school. Men and boys could therefore play an important role in sharing this burden with women and girls.

10. Participants agreed that men should strengthen their efforts to stop violence against women, including trafficking in women and children for the purpose of sexual exploitation. To break the vicious cycle of men and boys perpetrating violence against and sexually exploiting women, more awareness-raising activities were required. Participants noted the negative effect of the preponderance of sexual abuse, violence and negative stereotypical images of women in the media, including the Internet, on young boys. Personnel serving in United Nations peacekeeping operations needed greater awareness about gender equality, specifically to prevent sexual exploitation, violence against women and trafficking in women and children in the framework of such operations.

11. The importance of partnerships between men and women for gender equality

advocated for gender equality at the community level and at the level of individual families. At the community level, religious leaders, workers' groups, young men affected by HIV/AIDS, men working on human rights issues, parliamentarians, athletes and other male public figures had provided strong support for gender equality. At the family level, many men strove to construct "fair families" by sharing responsibilities and economic decision-making. The particular role of fathers in supporting girls' empowerment through education was emphasized. Strong commitment from men in key decision-making positions in support of gender equality was required for achieving broader organizational and institutional changes.

13. Concern was expressed that resources for initiatives to involve men and boys would be diverted from resources currently allocated to the advancement of women and girls. While the need to raise new funds for activities involving men and boys was also suggested, a more cost-effective approach would be to integrate the role of men and boys into all gender equality policies and strategies.

14. Participants emphasized that achieving gender equality required joint efforts at the national level by governments, parliaments, the private sector and other civil society actors, including religious leaders and the media, to develop national policies and programmes on gender equality that involved men and boys. Non-governmental organizations had been instrumental in bringing forward innovative ideas