

11 March 2009

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-third session

2-13 March 2009

Agenda item 3 (a) (i)

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

Panel discussion on key policy initiatives on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS

Moderator’s summary

1. At its third meeting, on 3 March 2009, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive panel discussion on the theme “Key policy initiatives on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS”. The panellists were: Patricia Espinosa Torres, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Mexico; Marilyn Waring, AUT University, New Zealand; Joseph Aimé Bidiga, Permanent Secretariat of the National Council to Combat HIV/AIDS, Burkina Faso; and Shahrashoub Razavi, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). The panel was moderated by Ara Margarian (Armenia), Vice-Chairperson of the Commission.

2. Efforts to address the unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men are part of the overall global agenda for the promotion of gender equality,

the Child, contain obligations for States parties to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men.

3. Participants noted that in order to achieve the equal sharing of responsibilities, issues related to unpaid care work, the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities and caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS had to be addressed. While the importance of care work for human capital formation, the maintenance of the social fabric of society and for social development and economic growth was stressed, time-use surveys had shown that women and girls performed most of the unpaid work, including domestic and care work. However, since unpaid work was not included in the United Nations System of National Accounts, this form of work was not counted in gross domestic products and therefore remained invisible. Owing to the unequal sharing of those responsibilities, women had fewer opportunities to take on paid employment and continued to be over-represented in part-time, casual and temporary work. They also had less time for education and training, leisure and self-care, and political activities.

4. Participants noted the need to share responsibility for care work more evenly within households and across society. Since care was provided through a variety of social relations and institutions, including the household, the State, the market and the not-for-profit sector, there was also an opportunity for increased involvement by all stakeholders in this work. The State had a critical role in providing social services, in regulating non-State service providers and in subsidizing services for those with low incomes. However, participants also voiced their concern that the current crisis, as had been the case in past economic crises, was leading to a shift in the provision of services from the market to the unpaid sector, especially with regard to care work.

5. Participants highlighted a range of policy initiatives, strategies and measures to encourage the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. The critical importance of enhancing legal frameworks to eliminate discrimination against women, to strengthen women's participation in public life and decision-making and to address all forms of violence against women was stressed.

6. Social policies, especially those that provided for universal education and health care, constituted a major contribution towards a reduction in women's responsibilities for unpaid care work and enhanced their opportunities for paid work and other activities. State-provided or publicly funded child- and elder-care services, as well as care for the sick, reduced the need for women to provide unpaid care for family members. Such public services could have a triple pay-off by providing quality care, creating paid employment in the care sector and enhancing women's opportunities to engage in paid work.

7. Improvements in the area of labour law aimed at achieving equality in the workplace and at preventing and addressing sexual harassment had resulted in larger numbers of women in paid employment. The impact of such efforts was further enhanced when they were accompanied by policies and measures to facilitate the reconciliation of paid and unpaid work, for example by providing maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave. Leave entitlements for the care of young children for both or either parent, as well as measures that required the father to make use of parental leave or to forfeit it, were seen as promising strategies to encourage men to share responsibilities. While there had been some positive experience with such

provisions, participants also voiced concern about the low take-up rates of paternity and parental leave by men.

8. Participants discussed a range of measures that recognized the value of women's unpaid domestic and care work. In many instances, such measures were aimed at promoting the sharing of responsibilities as well as addressing poverty and enhancing social protection for women and families. Social assistance programmes, such as cash-transfer schemes and cash benefits in the form of family and child allowances, were sometimes targeted at poor families or vulnerable groups to enhance their health and well-being. When combined with training opportunities, they facilitated women's participation in paid employment. Recognizing

