



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
16 March 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-ninth session

9-20 March 2015

Item 3 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”

Results of regional reviews conducted by the regional commissions of the United Nations

Chair’s summary

1. On 12 March 2015, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an interactive panel on the topic: “Results of regional reviews of the United Nations regional commissions”. The panel was chaired by Ms. Kanda Vajrabhaya, Chair of the Commission and was moderated by Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN-Women Executive Director. The panelists were: Mr. Christian Friis Bach Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe; Ms. Rima Khalaf, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; Ms. Shamshad Akhtar, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, who participated via video, as did Mr. Antonio Prado, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Mr Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa contributed via a video message.

2. The five regions held regional review processes under the auspices of the regional commissions of the United Nations, in partnership and collaboration with UN-Women. The Economic Commission for Europe held its Regional Review Meeting on 6 and 7 November 2014 in Geneva, with an outcome in the form of Co-chairpersons’ conclusions. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific convened the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, from 17 to 20 November 2014 in Bangkok, which adopted the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and

* E/CN.6/2015/1.

Women's Empowerment. The Economic Commission for Africa held the Ninth African Regional Conference on Women from 17 to 19 November 2014 in Addis Ababa, resulting in the adoption of the Addis Ababa Declaration on Accelerating the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action: Towards a transformational change for women and girls in Africa. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean held a special session of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in Santiago, from 17 to 19 November 2014, which adopted a statement on the occasion. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia convened an intergovernmental Arab High-Level Conference on Progress Achieved in Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action after 20 Years, from 2 to 3 February 2015, in Cairo, which concluded with the adoption of the Arab Declaration: Towards Justice and Equality for Women in the Arab Region.

3. The regional review processes and their outcomes highlighted a number of region-specific priorities. ECE outlined as the way forward: gender equality for inclusive and sustainable societies with a focus on closing gender gaps through economic and social policies; women's representation in policy and decision-making; preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls; and governance and gender justice. Aside from validating the continuing relevance of the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action, ESCAP identified five areas to accelerate implementation in the future, namely: strengthening institutions, including national gender equality machineries; increasing financing for gender equality and gender-responsive budgeting; enhancing accountability; forging stronger partnerships between governments, the UN system, the private sector, civil society and other actors; and strengthening regional cooperation. ECA called for strategic action on economic empowerment of women through the creation of decent jobs, poverty reduction, social protection and social security; education and training; women's reproductive health and HIV/AIDS; violence against women and girls; peace, security and development; women in power and decision-making positions; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women and girls; women and the media; women, the environment and climate change; and the girl child. ECLAC stressed the importance of prioritizing gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda, in addition to increasing financing and a shift in focus from micro- to macro-economic policies in order to strengthen women's economic empowerment; and highlighted the links between women's economic, physical and political autonomy. ESCWA stressed the need for more comprehensive legislative reforms to eliminate gender discrimination; for enabling institutional mechanisms to protect women from violence and secure their human rights; for systematic support towards greater women's political and economic participation; and for dedicated resources to sustain achievements and protect acquired rights, focusing specifically on women under Israeli occupation and in conflict, forced displacement, and humanitarian settings.

4. The discussion of the key findings from the regions, and the main policy recommendations and strategies for future action underscored the important role of the regional commissions in the follow-up to and implementation of the regional reviews. Across all regions, gender equality, women's empowerment and the human rights of women and girls were increasingly recognized as key to creating stronger and more sustainable societies for all, and thus central to development planning.

5. Speakers welcomed that countries had ratified international and regional human rights instruments, removed discrimination in law, and enacted and strengthened legislative and policy frameworks to promote gender mainstreaming. Women's political participation has increased, as has women's and girls' access to education, with many countries across all regions achieving gender parity. Maternal mortality rates have decreased, and women's life expectancy rates in many regions continued their upward trend.

6. Despite progress, participants identified remaining gaps and challenges. Gaps persist between existing legislation and its implementation in most areas of the Beijing Platform for Action, requiring urgent action. Greater political will is needed to raise awareness of and realize women's human rights. Labour market segregation persists, with many women in lower paid jobs with limited or no social protection, rendering them particularly vulnerable in times of economic and political crisis. The gender pay gap holds back women's economic advancement, requiring urgent action and measures such as paid maternity/paternity and parental leave and child care facilities. Gaps in women's access to land, credit, financial services, and other productive resources impede women's ability to attain economic independence and social mobility. These gaps also limit women's ability to cope with increasingly frequent and severe climate or natural disasters. Violence against women and girls and insufficient accountability of perpetrators remained major concerns in all regions. Such violence is further exacerbated in times of conflict and displacement. Monitoring and evaluation of policies remain inadequate, due in part to a lack of data collection and statistics disaggregated by sex, gender, age, educational level, income and other factors.

7. Participants stressed the need for women's economic empowerment, with emphasis on the needs of young women, especially in the light of high unemployment of young women in some regions. Some participants voiced concern about increasing rates of depression and psychological disorders among women and girls in their regions. The need for access to sexual and reproductive health, and to end child, early and forced marriage was stressed, including in humanitarian settings. Speakers also highlighted that transformation of gender norms and gender stereotypes was one of the crucial steps in achieving substantive equality for women and girls. The situation of marginalized groups of women such as women with disabilities and migrant women required targeted attention.

8. Persistent conflicts, ongoing foreign occupation, and the emergence of violent extremism constituted serious obstacles to development and the pursuit of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Greater efforts were needed to engage women in peace building and transitional security measures, and to tackle gender stereotypes and discriminatory norms, practices and attitudes.

9. National mechanisms for gender equality continued to be of vital importance for translating political will into concrete measures that promote gender equality and women's empowerment at all levels. Systematic mainstreaming of gender perspectives was necessary throughout all sectors of government, requiring capacity building efforts across all ministries, together with stepped-up efforts to institutionalize gender-sensitive budgeting.

10. Participants underlined the important role of a strong civil society and the participation of women's and feminist groups and the media in the promotion of gender equality, women's empowerment and the human rights of women and girls.

States were called upon to provide an enabling environment and avenues for such groups and all other stakeholders to engage with government at all levels in order to bring about needed legal and policy changes for improvements in women's and girls' lives. Participants also stressed the importance of engaging men and boys in working toward the achievement of gender equality.

11. Speakers reiterated the importance of positioning gender equality at the core of the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda and a sustainable development framework. Strong support was expressed for a standalone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment as well as the need to mainstream gender perspectives throughout all goals and targets in the post-2015 development framework, as recommended in the report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals.

12. Participants recognized the work of UN-Women and the UN system in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, and the need to forge effective relationships across a broad spectrum of stakeholders for real change. The regional reviews had been instrumental in mobilizing stakeholders at the regional levels, and the momentum generated should contribute to effective cooperation and commitment by all actors in the accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

13. The regional commissions as the regional arms of the United Nations reiterated their commitments to support Member States and all stakeholders in implementing progressive agendas for gender equality and women's empowerment, and to help mobilize necessary resources in support of the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Note: Further information on the panel is available by clicking [here](#).