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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 the critical areas of concern

Ways and means to further enhance the impact of the work of the Commission on the Status of Women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2013/18, reviews the functioning of the Commission’s methods of work in the light of experience gained, and makes recommendations for consideration by the Commission with a view to further enhancing the impact of its work.

* E/CN.6/2014/1.



I. Introduction

1. The present report, prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2013/18, provides: an overview of the working methods of the Commission on the Status of Women which have been in place since 2006 and were confirmed in 2009 (see Council resolutions 2006/9 and 2009/15); a review of the functioning of the Commission's methods of work and makes recommendations for consideration by the Commission with a view to further enhancing the impact of its work; and a discussion of the recent strengthening of the Economic and Social Council (see General Assembly resolution 68/1) and opportunities and implications for the work of the Commission.

2. The review by the Commission of the functioning of its methods of work provides an opportunity to strengthen the impact of its work based on lessons learned about what works and what could be further refined and improved, with a view to making it more effective and strategic and enhancing its monitoring capacity.

II. Mandate of the Commission, its programme of work and its role

Mandate and terms of reference

3. The mandate and terms of reference of the Commission have evolved since its establishment by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 11 (II) of 21 June 1946. In that resolution the Council mandated the Commission to prepare recommendations and reports on promoting women's rights in the political, economic, civil, social and educational fields and to make recommendations on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights. The objectives of the Commission are to promote the principle that men and women should have equal rights and to develop proposals to give effect to recommendations in that regard. In its resolution 1987/22, the Council expanded the terms of reference of the Commission to include: promoting the objectives of equality, development and peace; monitoring the implementation of measures for the advancement of women; and reviewing and appraising progress made at the national, subregional, regional, sectoral and global levels.

4. Following the Fourth World Conference of Women in 1995, the General Assembly, in its resolution 50/203, decided that the Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission, in accordance with their respective mandates, would constitute a three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism that would play the primary role in overall policymaking and follow-up, and in coordinating the implementation and monitoring of the Platform for Action adopted at the Conference.

5. In 1996 the Council again expanded the terms of reference of the Commission to include monitoring, reviewing and appraising progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at all levels and advising the Council thereon (see Council resolution 1996/6). It also asked the Commission to further develop its catalytic role in regard to gender mainstreaming. After the twenty-third special session of the General

Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century” in 2000 (see General Assembly resolutions S-23/2 and S-27/3), the Assembly, in its resolution 55/71, confirmed the Commission’s primary responsibility for follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the outcome of the twenty-third special session.

Programme of work

6. Since 1987, the Commission on the Status of Women has discharged its mandate through the use of a multi-year programme of work (Council resolutions 1987/24, 1990/15, 1996/6, 2001/4, 2006/9, 2009/15 and 2013/18, by which the Commission determines, in advance, the thematic issues to be discussed over, on average, a subsequent three- to five-year period. The number of issues taken up each year and the focus of the consideration has evolved over time, as outlined below.

7. Following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Commission applied a focused and thematic approach to its multi-year programme of work that reflected the critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action. This approach was later endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1998/46, in which it noted the importance of the use of multi-year thematic programmes by its functional commissions, especially in relation to follow-up to major United Nations conferences.

8. During the period from 1997 to 1999, the Commission considered at each session a cluster of critical areas of concern from the Beijing Platform for Action (see Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/6). In the period from 2002 to 2006, also building on the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the Commission’s work programme contained two thematic items per session. Since 2007, the Commission has considered one priority theme and one review theme at each session (see Council resolution 2006/9). It has conducted a review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly at five-year intervals, in 2005 and 2010, and it will do so again in 2015 (see Council resolutions 2001/4, 2009/15 and 2013/18).

9. As part of its work, the Commission annually receives and considers communications relating to the status of women.¹ This is governed by several Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions, including: resolution 76 (V), establishing a procedure by which the Commission would receive and consider communications relating to the status of women; resolution 304 I (XI) amending resolution 76 (V); resolution 1983/27, reaffirming the mandate of the Commission to consider confidential and non-confidential communications on the status of women and authorizing the Commission to appoint a working group to consider such communications and prepare a report thereon for the Commission; resolution 1993/11, reaffirming that the Commission was empowered to make recommendations to the Council on what action should be taken on emerging trends and patterns of discrimination against women revealed by such communications; decision 2002/235, making the communications procedure of the Commission more

¹ Any individual, non-governmental organization, group or network may submit to the Commission on the Status of Women complaints, appeals or petitions containing information relating to alleged violations of human rights that affect the status of women in any country in the world. These are referred to as “communications”.

effective and efficient; and resolution 2009/16, deciding that the Commission should appoint the members of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women for a two-year period. In its decision 2002/235 and resolution 2009/16, the Council requested the Secretary-General to publicize the communications procedure of the Commission.

Importance of the Commission

10. The Commission is the unchallenged leader on issues of gender equality and the empowerment of women at the global level. It is a deliberative, consensus-building and policymaking body that has one of the highest profiles of any of the intergovernmental bodies that meet at the United Nations. It attracts dozens of ministers and senior government officials with large national delegations to its annual sessions including broad representation by non-governmental organizations. Participation at that level is confirmation that Governments and other stakeholders value the annual discussion and the dialogue that takes place on the good practices, gaps, challenges and further actions required to accelerate the achievement of gender equality.

11. In its resolution [64/289](#), the General Assembly took action to strengthen the institutional arrangements for the support of gender equality and the empowerment of women by establishing the United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). In that resolution, the Assembly decided that the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on the Status of Women should constitute the multi-tiered intergovernmental governance structure for normative support functions and shall provide normative policy guidance to the UN-Women. It also requested the Commission and the Executive Board, established as the governing body of UN-Women, to provide intergovernmental support to and supervision of its operational activities and to work closely together to provide coherent guidance and direction in their respective areas. This mandate enables the Commission to work in tandem with the Executive Board to enhance the linkages between the normative support function of UN-Women and its operational work at the country level.

12. The experience from the Commission's fifty-seventh session, which brought unprecedented visibility to the session itself and to the results achieved, demonstrated the effectiveness and strategic value of the Commission and its role in shaping the agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment. Support provided by UN-Women to the work of the Commission, including through substantive preparations, advocacy, alliance-building, outreach and United Nations system-wide engagement, contributed to this enhanced capacity. As a consequence, the Commission now has a strengthened basis to further enhance the impact of its work, expand its monitoring role in regard to the follow-up to and implementation of the normative framework and build increased symbiosis with the work of the Executive Board.

Catalytic role of the Commission

13. The Commission, in the exercise of its mandate to act as a catalyst in support of gender mainstreaming in all areas of work of the United Nations (see Beijing Platform for Action, para. 320; Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/6), has regularly transmitted the outcome of its work to relevant intergovernmental

bodies and processes, thereby assisting such bodies in the integration of a gender perspective in their work. For example, its agreed conclusions of 2011 on access and participation of women and girls in education, training and science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work, supported the Economic and Social Council in the process of its consideration of its thematic priority and in the negotiation of its ministerial declaration. It also contributed to the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012.

14. The Commission has also interacted with other functional commissions and their respective secretariats. In recent years this collaboration has been most successful and sustained with the Statistical Commission. Several joint side events and panel discussions have enabled the two Commissions to exchange views on issues of common interest, including the development of indicators on violence against women and a minimum set of gender indicators.

15. At the same time, the Commission could intensify its efforts to interact with other functional commissions. Chairs of other commissions could be invited to address the Commission on substantive issues of common interest, and to share with the Commission their experiences with stakeholder participation, follow-up to outcomes and other aspects pertaining to working methods. In turn, the Chair of the Commission could address other commissions, as well as the Economic and Social Council, on topics also considered by the Commission. Such interaction would provide further visibility and increase the impact of the Commission's catalytic role.

16. Also as part of its catalytic role, and based on General Assembly resolution [64/289](#), the Commission could engage with the Executive Board of UN-Women in an effort to strengthen follow-up to and implementation of the outcomes of its session, especially of its agreed conclusions, at the national level. The Commission and the Executive Board could hold informal meetings on experiences gained and lessons learned through operational activities that support the implementation of Commission recommendations. Such exchanges could demonstrate how the global normative framework contributes to enhanced results for women and girls.

Recommendation: The Commission may wish to further enhance its catalytic role in support of gender mainstreaming, including cooperation with other functional commissions, through: the exchange of information on programmes of work; joint informal panel discussions; the exchange of outcomes of sessions; participation, through its Chair, in other intergovernmental processes; and informal interaction with the Executive Board of UN-Women on operational activities in support of the implementation of agreed conclusions. It may also wish to expand the scope of transmittal of the outcomes of its work to relevant intergovernmental bodies and processes.

III. Organization and methods of work of the Commission, and recommendations

17. The methods of work adopted by the Economic and Social Council in 2006 (see resolution 2006/9), and confirmed following a review of their functioning in 2009 (see resolution 2009/15), responded to the changes in the number of thematic issues considered at each session. They also responded to new expectations that

emanated from intergovernmental mandates, especially after the adoption, in 2005, of the Declaration of the Commission on the Status of Women on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Council decision 2005/232). The following year the Council recognized that the Commission's organization of work should contribute to advancing the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2006/9).

18. The current methods of work (see resolutions 2006/9 and 2009/15) provide for: the consideration of one priority theme and one review per session, as determined by a multi-year programme of work; discussion of emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men that require urgent attention; and participation of stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations. These issues are discussed below.

19. The working methods seek to contribute to advancing and accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly at all levels. They aim to provide increased opportunities for sharing and exchanging ideas, experiences, lessons learned and good practices from the national level through interactive dialogue and events, with the participation of high-level officials and experts. They foster engagement on issues, and also seek to strengthen the Commission's contribution to the work of the Economic and Social Council. In view of the traditional importance of non-governmental organizations in the promotion of gender equality, the Commission encourages such organizations to participate in its work.

Multi-year thematic programme of work

20. The multi-year thematic approach, which currently encompasses one priority theme and one review theme per session, has enabled the Commission to undertake a systematic follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action and to take up themes and issues that required further consideration in the light of new developments. It has also strengthened the Commission's capacity to undertake a careful analysis of the selected themes, with sufficient lead time to facilitate substantive preparations. At the request of the Commission, a panel event is organized on the margins of each annual session on the priority theme of the following session in order that Member States and other participants may engage in preliminary discussions on the theme. This preview panel provides an early opportunity for the Commission's secretariat to give an indication of the proposed focus and enables Member States to make inputs and voice expectations at an early stage about the substantive approach that could be taken to the theme.

21. In 2013, the Commission approved its themes for 2015 and 2016. It will consider and take a decision on its future multi-year programme of work in 2016, bearing in mind the results of the process on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council (see Council resolution 2013/18 and General Assembly resolution [68/1](#)). This timing will enable the Commission to respond to the findings of the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action scheduled to take place in 2015, as well as the outcomes of intergovernmental processes pertaining to the post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals.

22. The experience with the use of a multi-year programme of work has been positive. Consideration of only one priority theme per session has facilitated in-depth examination of the theme, and the review of the outcomes of that consideration after several sessions (currently three) has enhanced the Commission's capacity to monitor progress and has thus strengthened accountability for follow-up.

Recommendation: The Commission may wish to continue to use a multi-year thematic approach to its work.

Priority theme

23. In accordance with its methods of work, the Commission considers one priority theme at each session, based on the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Between 2007 and 2013, excluding 2010 when it undertook the 15-year review and appraisal of the Platform for Action, the Commission considered six priority themes, as follows: elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child (2007); financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women (2008); the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS (2009); access and participation of women and girls in education, training and science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work (2011); the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges (2012); and elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls (2013).

24. In support of the Commission's consideration of the priority theme, the Secretary-General is mandated to prepare an analytical report which includes data and other quantitative and qualitative information to illustrate progress in implementation. As the Commission has a catalytic role in mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and programmes (see paras. 13 to 16 above), the Secretary-General is also mandated to prepare a report on progress in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development, implementation and evaluation of national policies and programmes, with particular focus on the priority theme. Member States are invited to provide written inputs for the preparation of the report.

25. The mandate for the two reports enables the Secretary-General to provide the substantive evidence base to underpin the Commission's deliberations, together with experiences and good practices of Member States and the United Nations system in regard to gender mainstreaming in the priority theme and resulting recommendations for action to accelerate progress. The use of expert group meetings to elaborate inputs for the priority theme further deepens the substantive preparations. These expert group meetings, which are convened by UN-Women, usually in collaboration with other United Nations entities, bring together cutting-edge knowledge, experience and expertise on the subject matter under consideration, and their recommendations enhance the basis for action by policymakers.

Recommendation: The Commission may wish to continue the current mandate that requests the Secretary-General to prepare two reports on the priority theme.

26. The Commission achieves a sustained focus on the selected priority theme through several components of its methods of work, including the general discussion, a high-level round table and two interactive expert panels.

27. In the general discussion on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, emphasis is placed on goals attained, achievements, gaps and challenges in relation to implementation with regard to the priority theme. In addition to Member States, representatives of civil society and the United Nations system participate in the general discussion. The number of speakers in the general discussion has grown steadily (155 in 2011, 157 in 2012, and 189 in 2013), and the Commission uses the practice of limiting the length of statements to ensure efficiency and good time management. Among the 189 speakers in 2013 were one Prime Minister, two Vice-Presidents, two Deputy Prime Ministers and 70 ministers from Member States.

28. The general discussion is an essential space for representatives of Member States, civil society and the United Nations system to present their views on the current status of gender equality. The number and level of participants confirms the importance of the Commission as the primary global forum for Member States to share their perspectives on progress and challenges, and for gender equality advocates from different institutional backgrounds to gather in solidarity around a common cause.

Recommendation: The Commission may wish to continue to hold a general discussion, with a focus on the priority theme, to consolidate its role and its strategic value as the primary global forum for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment.

29. A high-level round table (in two parallel meetings) at the beginning of the session, with the participation of ministers from Member States and other high-level officials from national capitals focuses on experiences, lessons learned and good practices related to the priority theme. A discussion guide presents possible questions for consideration. In order to promote an interactive nature, speakers are encouraged to be brief, to ask questions and to offer comments on interventions made during the dialogue. While the presentation of written statements is discouraged and no speakers' list is established, the format of the interaction is comparable to that of the general discussion. Interest in the high-level round table is consistently high, and on average well over 60 ministers and other senior government officials participate. A small number of invited representatives from the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations (usually two per round table) respond to the discussion. The outcome is presented in a summary by the Chairs.

30. The Commission further discusses the priority theme in two interactive expert panels. These expert dialogues examine key elements of the priority theme and progress in mainstreaming and facilitate the exchange of good practice and lessons learned from the national level. Panels are composed of experts nominated by Member States, the United Nations system and civil society. The panels also include a participant from the expert group meeting convened in preparation for the session. On average, 8 to 10 panellists on two panels make short introductory presentations. Those are followed by interactive discussions, during which speakers present national practices and also pose questions to the panellists. Interest in these events is consistently high: frequently, more delegations and representatives of non-governmental

organizations ask to contribute to the discussion than can be accommodated within the allotted time. The reports of the Secretary-General and the panellists' presentations frame the discussion, and key issues raised in the dialogue are reflected in the moderators' summaries.

31. The consideration of one priority theme with the participation of expert panellists has enabled the Commission to undertake a more in-depth and comprehensive consideration of the selected topic and to address new issues from a policy perspective. The involvement of experts has also enhanced the substantive quality of discussions. Member States and other participants share national experiences and activities, provide examples of good practices and of progress made and discuss constraints and challenges identified. These insights are channelled towards strengthening the global policy framework.

32. While the discussions have attracted many speakers, including at the ministerial level, the interactive nature of the dialogues and the focus on the topic at hand could be enhanced through a more free-flowing exchange among participants. Interventions could more strongly focus on the impact of actions and on results achieved rather than on processes and activities. The number of panels devoted to the priority theme could be expanded, with the addition of discussions on intersectional or intergenerational perspectives in relation to the priority theme.

Recommendation: The Commission may wish to maintain and further enhance the interactive nature of the consideration of its priority theme, with the participation of high-level representatives as well as experts. It may also wish to continue to work on improving the interactive quality of the dialogues and to create additional opportunities for Member States and other stakeholders to share experiences and lessons learned on the priority theme, from a range of perspectives, and to strengthen commitment for further action.

33. The outcome of the Commission's annual discussion on the priority theme takes the form of agreed conclusions, negotiated by all States. The conclusions identify gaps and challenges in the implementation of previous commitments and make action-oriented recommendations for all States, relevant intergovernmental bodies, mechanisms and entities of the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders in order to accelerate their implementation. The level of detail of the agreed conclusions has fluctuated with, for example, 84 actions in 2007, 39 in 2008, 54 in 2009, 46 in 2011 and 69 in 2013.

34. The format of agreed conclusions was used by the Economic and Social Council from 1994 to 2003 as the outcome of the coordination segment (see General Assembly resolution 48/162), after which the Council reverted back to the format of a resolution. The Commission's agreed conclusions are adopted by consensus and contain a general or preambular section followed by actions addressed to governments and other stakeholders. Since the Commission adopted this format in 1997, it has twice failed to produce an outcome on the priority theme under consideration, in 2003 (women's human rights and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls) and in 2012 (the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges). On several occasions the Commission has been unable to complete its work within the two-week session and has had to resume at a later stage in order to adopt its agreed conclusions (including in 2011, 2008 and 2006). The Commission

has now added informal meetings just prior to the session to ensure the timely completion of its work on the last day of the session.

35. The Commission is the only functional commission that continues to use the format of agreed conclusions as the outcome of intergovernmental negotiations. Other functional commissions, such as the Commission on Social Development and the Commission on Population and Development, use the format of a resolution for negotiated outcomes on thematic issues.

36. The Commission uses the format of resolutions for its other action-oriented outcomes. There is an understanding among members of the Commission on the desirability of taking action by consensus. If consensus is not possible, the Commission takes action by voting, in accordance with the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council.

37. The Economic and Social Council now uses the format of a ministerial declaration for the outcome of its high-level segment. While the Council has usually adopted its ministerial declaration in the course of its substantive session, the ministerial declaration of 2013 was adopted at a resumed session in December 2013.

38. The examples provided indicate that intergovernmental bodies use different formats, and also suggest that there have been changes in the format used.

Recommendation: The Commission may wish to consider possible options for the outcome on its priority theme.

Review theme

39. In accordance with its methods of work, the Commission evaluates progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on a priority theme from a previous session on an annual basis, and has done so since 2007 (see resolution 2006/9). The review themes have been: the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality (2007); women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution, and in post-conflict peacebuilding (2008); equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels (2009); the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child (2011); financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women (2012); and the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS (2013).

40. The format of the review, which initially consisted of one meeting devoted to an interactive dialogue, has recently been modified and more time is now devoted to the review in an effort to deepen the evaluation of progress made. The reviews have been facilitated by keynote statements, expert speakers and national presentations, including inputs from other stakeholders, such as representatives of international organizations. They have examined measures, mechanisms and processes put in place for implementing the agreed conclusions, as well as good practices, lessons learned and gaps and challenges. Issue papers prepared by the Secretariat provide updates on the status of implementation and present issues for discussion. The main points raised during the interactive dialogue, especially recommendations for further initiatives, are reflected in a moderator's summary.

41. The consideration of a review theme to evaluate progress in the implementation of the outcome on the priority theme of a previous session has

enhanced the Commission's capacity to monitor progress on commitments made and has thus enhanced accountability of stakeholders. The Commission uses interactive dialogues, which provide an important opportunity to maintain a focus on previously adopted policy recommendations. While this exchange of experiences, lessons learned and good practices enables the Commission to further monitor progress and gaps and challenges in these substantive areas at the national level and to promote accelerated implementation, the impact of agreed conclusions on national policy environments has not always been well documented, and the linkages between previous commitments and action taken in response thereto not well established. Improvements could be achieved by broadening the range of stakeholders that participate in review sessions, for example through country presentations involving participants from different institutional backgrounds addressed in the agreed conclusions (for example governments, civil society, academia, the private sector and the media), and the provision of concrete evidence and monitoring, in order to help the Commission to evaluate progress achieved.

42. Member States could be encouraged to submit written assessments in advance of the session, which, together with the findings from the operational work of UN-Women, could be synthesized into background documentation and posted on the website. A joint panel discussion between the Commission and the Executive Board of UN-Women could be convened to examine the operational response to the policy guidance provided by the agreed conclusions on the priority theme.

43. The outcome of the consideration of the review theme is in the form of a moderator's summary of the discussion, which is widely disseminated but not negotiated. This summary highlights the key points and any recommendations made during the debate. As such, it serves as a record and provides ideas for further action by stakeholders. Depending on circumstances, the Commission has transmitted moderator's summaries as inputs to other intergovernmental processes to encourage their attention to gender perspectives. Such efforts would further enhance the Commission's capacity to monitor follow-up to its work and to a more systematic implementation of its policy guidance.

Recommendation: The Commission may wish to continue to evaluate progress in the implementation of previous agreed conclusions on the priority theme. It may wish to retain the interactive nature of the review, and expand it through national voluntary presentations, the submission of written assessments of progress by Member States, the preparation of analysis and joint panel discussions of the Commission and the Executive Board of UN-Women in order to further enhance follow-up and implementation of its policy guidance. It may wish to maintain, as an outcome, a summary of the discussion.

Emerging issues theme

44. Since 1997, the Commission has considered, on an annual basis, an item on emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men that require urgent consideration (in accordance with Council resolution 1996/6). The topic, which is selected interessionally by the bureau of the Commission, in consultation with all States through their regional groups, takes into account developments at the global and regional levels as well as planned activities within the United Nations, where increased attention to gender perspectives is required. Since 2007, the Commission

has considered the following topics: elimination of all forms of violence against women: follow-up to the Secretary-General's in-depth study at national and international levels (2007); gender perspectives on climate change (2008); gender perspectives of the financial crisis (2009); gender equality and sustainable development (2011); engaging young women and men, girls and boys, to advance gender equality (2012); and key gender equality issues to be reflected in the post-2015 development framework (2013).

45. Issue papers prepared by the Secretariat, complemented by panels of experts to launch the discussions, facilitate the Commission's consideration of the topics. The main points raised during the interactive dialogue, especially recommendations for action, are reflected in a moderator's summary.

46. The emerging issue theme has provided a flexible and timely opportunity for the Commission to select a current topic for consideration, thereby complementing its multi-year programme of work and predetermined priority and review themes. Using this format, the Commission has been able to react quickly to new developments that required its attention and to exercise its catalytic role by contributing gender perspectives to the broader intergovernmental agenda of the United Nations, while also systematically deepening the normative and policy framework on gender equality and women's empowerment. This has been the case for the topics selected in recent years, where the Commission has contributed to the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, assessed the impact of current issues and provided its input to other intergovernmental processes, including the work of the Economic and Social Council.

Recommendation: The Commission may wish to retain an item on emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men that require urgent consideration, to be selected intersessionally by its bureau in consultation with Member States. In selecting a theme, the Commission may wish to bear in mind opportunities for contributing to, and strengthening coherence with, the thematic work of the Economic and Social Council or with other relevant intergovernmental processes.

Participation of stakeholders

47. The Commission's methods of work envisage broad participation from a range of stakeholders (see Council resolution 2006/9). Consequently, the Commission attracts a very large number of participants to its annual sessions. Many national delegations are led by government ministers and include senior officials and technical experts. This political and expert participation confirms the importance that stakeholders attach to the annual sessions of the Commission.

48. It is the established pattern in the Commission that high-level government officials usually attend the first part of the session, where they participate in the high-level round table and the general discussion, as well as the panel discussions on the priority theme, and in side events. Technical experts from national capitals sometimes participate for the duration of the session and participate in panel discussions and the consideration of other items, as well as in negotiations on the Commission's outcomes.

49. Given the importance that Member States attach to the sessions, consideration could be given as to how to ensure the most conducive environment for the participation of ministers/senior officials and technical experts from governments and of other participants, especially those from civil society, to further strengthen the impact of the Commission's work.

50. While the high-level round table attracts strong participation, its current format closely resembles the general discussion. Consideration could therefore be given to reconfiguring the early part of the Commission's session into a ministerial segment by merging the high-level round table and the first part of the general discussion in a manner that would fully recognize the large number of State ministers in attendance and further enhance the political significance of the Commission.

51. It is the established practice of the Economic and Social Council as well as its functional commissions to open sessions at the ministerial level. High-visibility openings of the functional commissions commonly include the participation of the Secretary-General or the Deputy Secretary-General, the President of the Economic and Social Council and other senior officials. In the case of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of UN-Women addresses the opening meeting. An alternative may be the option of a closing segment at the ministerial level, which could provide added impetus for all stakeholders to follow up and take action in accordance with the adopted outcome, thus increasing the impact of the Commission's work.

Recommendation: The Commission may wish to consider the designation of parts of its session as a ministerial segment. The option of a ministerial-level closing segment could be considered.

Participation of non-governmental organizations

52. The active participation and contribution of non-governmental organizations should be a critical element in the work of the Commission. Such organizations have made significant contributions to the shaping of the global policy framework on gender equality and women's empowerment, and they play an important role in holding international and national leaders accountable for commitments made. This role was also recognized by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2006/9, in which it emphasized that such organizations should be encouraged to participate, to the maximum extent possible, in the work of the Commission and in the monitoring and implementation process related to the Fourth World Conference on Women.

53. There has been a significant increase in the number of individuals attending the annual sessions of the Commission and in the number of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council that they belong to. In 2007, 2008 and 2009, just under 2,000 representatives from approximately 325 organizations attended annually. In 2012, 2,084 representatives from 435 organizations attended, and in 2013, 2,888 representatives from 557 non-governmental organizations attended. At the same time, non-governmental organizations want to make greater substantive contributions to the work of the Commission, and have been advocating for greater opportunity for meaningful engagement with Member States so that they can add value to the discussions and to the work of the Commission. In particular, they have requested to be allowed to designate a small number of regionally diverse representatives to observe

negotiations on the agreed conclusions, it being understood that they would not make interventions. As observers they would be able to follow the negotiations and enhance their understanding of and contribution to the work of the Commission.

54. At present, representatives of non-governmental organizations can only nominally participate in the general discussion and in panel discussions, in which less than 5 per cent of representatives of non-governmental organizations in attendance are given the floor due to the way the sessions are currently structured. On the other hand, there has been an increase in the number of written statements submitted by non-governmental organizations or groups of non-governmental organizations. In 2013, 228 written statements were issued in the six official languages, which was a significant increase from previous years, when fewer than 80 statements were received annually.

55. While representatives are welcomed at formal meetings very few seats are available. Aside from the limited seating, it has been necessary under the capital master plan to restrict entry for representatives of non-governmental organizations to the building in which the formal meetings are held to two representatives per organization. This issue hampers the efforts of non-governmental organizations to interact and advocate their views with government delegations on critical and strategic issues being discussed at the Commission.

56. Non-governmental organizations convene a large number of parallel events in the vicinity of United Nations Headquarters. They also frequently co-sponsor side events organized by Member States and entities of the United Nations system at Headquarters. Representatives of non-governmental organizations attend these parallel and side events in large numbers.

57. A more participatory and value-added engagement of non-governmental stakeholders would enrich the sessions and increase their commitment to follow-up at national level, thus enhancing the impact of the Commission's work. Additional opportunities for interaction between government representatives and other stakeholders' groups during the session would create space for sharing of views and expectations. Observer status at informal meetings of Member States would provide more opportunities for advocacy.

Recommendation: The Commission may wish to consider expanding opportunities for non-governmental organizations to contribute to its work through allocating more time to interventions by non-governmental organizations during the general discussion, according greater priority to their interventions during panel discussions and granting a limited number of regionally diverse representatives access to negotiations.

Communications on the status of women

58. Prior to each session, a working group of the Commission consisting of five members meets to consider the list of confidential communications and the replies from governments. The working group submits its report to the Commission which considers it in a closed meeting. The number of communications received has increased over time, particularly in the past five years. In line with relevant resolutions, UN-Women has enhanced its website to increase the visibility of and provide more information on this procedure. This information explains who can submit a communication and how, and a chart delineates the procedure and timeline.

UN-Women also publicizes the procedure on social media and disseminates information via e-mail to non-governmental organizations about approaching deadlines.

Interaction with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

59. Member States recognize that the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the fulfilment of the obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are mutually reinforcing in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. The importance of the role of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has thus been recognized by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2006/9, which invites the Committee to contribute, where appropriate, to the discussion on the priority theme of the Commission. As a result, the Chair of the Committee addresses the Commission at its opening meeting, and Committee experts are regularly invited to participate: as panellists on the priority themes, as was the case in 2007 and 2008; as respondents in the high-level round table, as was the case in 2011 and 2013; or in the expert group meeting convened by UN-Women in preparation for the priority theme, as was the case in preparation for the 2012 session. One of the panel discussions at the Commission's 15-year review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action in 2010 commemorated 30 years of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

60. The impact of the Commission's work could be further enhanced through more systematic interaction with the Committee in relation to the thematic issues on the Commission's agenda. This could include panel discussions with Committee experts, for example on trends and challenges observed by the Committee in the implementation of its mandate as they pertain to a thematic issue before the Commission, recommendations issued by the Committee to States parties and follow-up undertaken by States parties thereon. Such interaction would enrich the Commission's deliberations, and contribute to accelerated implementation of its agreed conclusions.

Recommendation: The Commission may wish to expand its interaction with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in regard to thematic issues on the Commission's programme of work, for example through panel discussions.

IV. Reform of the Economic and Social Council and implications for the work of the Commission

61. The recent strengthening of the Economic and Social Council (see General Assembly resolution [68/1](#)) has a direct impact on the methods of work of the functional commissions. The Council's new working arrangements anticipate focused contributions from its subsidiary bodies to its work, in keeping with the Council's agreed theme.

62. The main new components that relate to the work of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, which need to be borne in mind by the Commission as it reviews its own working methods, include: the adjustment

of the Council's programme of work to a July-to-July cycle; the harmonization and coordination of the agendas and work programmes of the functional commissions in the follow-up to United Nations conferences and summits by promoting a clearer division of labour among them and providing clear policy guidance to them; and the use of a main theme for its annual programme of work. The subsidiary bodies and the governing bodies of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies will be invited to contribute, as appropriate, to the Council's work in keeping with the agreed theme.

63. The current segment structure of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council will be revised to include an integration segment, which will have the function of consolidating inputs of Member States, the subsidiary bodies of the Council, the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders and promoting the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. The integration segment, which is expected to take place in May, will bring together the key messages from the Council and its functional commissions on the main theme and develop action-oriented recommendations for follow-up.

64. Dedicated coordination and management meetings will perform the functions of the former coordination and general segments of the Economic and Social Council. The report of the Commission on the Status of Women is expected to be taken up at a coordination and management meeting in June.

65. The Economic and Social Council is expected to make transitional arrangements for holding the annual ministerial review during the high-level segments in 2014 and 2015. The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, meeting at the ministerial level, will take place during the Council's high-level segment.

66. With the further strengthening of the Economic and Social Council and the adoption of a July-to-July cycle, the Council will determine the theme of its high-level segment in July, after the election of its new bureau. The Commission will be invited to contribute to this topic, for consideration at the Council's integration segment.

67. The theme for the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in 2014 is "Addressing ongoing and emerging challenges for meeting the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 and for sustaining development gains in the future". The theme for the 2014 integration segment is sustainable urbanization. The Council will continue to have a multi-year programme of work, covering two years. It is expected that the Council will agree on the themes for 2015 and 2016 in the course of 2014.

68. The Commission has consistently provided substantive inputs to the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council, including overviews of the policy recommendations adopted by the Commission, or has transmitted the results of its review or emerging issue themes. It has also convened panel discussions with the purpose of contributing to the Council's high-level segment. The Commission has also consistently followed up on guidance provided by the Council, and the Presidents of the Council have regularly addressed the Commission, either at the opening of its annual sessions, or during the consideration of the relevant agenda item.

69. Its track record indicates that the Commission will continue to contribute to the work of the Economic and Social Council, in particular to the Council's high-level segment. It will also contribute to the High-level Political Forum. In addition to the alignment of the Commission's thematic priorities with those of the Council, the Commission's standing agenda item on follow-up to Council resolutions and decisions, as well as its emerging issue theme, provide entry points for the Commission to contribute to the Council's work. As the Council will apply a two-year programme of work, the Commission will have future opportunities to align its own thematic focus areas with those of the Council.

70. At the same time, the Council's new segment structure and thematic approach provide increased opportunities for reflection of gender perspectives and for dynamic interaction between the Commission and its parent body, thereby further enhancing the impact of its work.

Recommendations: The Commission may wish to: stress its commitment to contribute to the work of the Economic and Social Council from its substantive perspective and to serve as a catalyst for integrating a gender perspective in the work of the Council; align its thematic priorities with those of the Council in order to provide effective and targeted inputs from a gender perspective; and encourage the Council to expand opportunities for discussion and interaction among the Council's subsidiary bodies on the gender perspectives of all dimensions of sustainable development so as to strengthen gender mainstreaming in all areas of the global policy framework.
