Economic and Social Council

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-fifth session
15–26 March 2021
Agenda item 3
**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"**

Ministerial round table on "Creating an enabling environment for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life"

Chair's summary

1.   On 15 and 16 March 2021, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the theme "Creating an enabling environment for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life", in the context of the priority theme "Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls". Participants exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the topic, with an emphasis on measures taken to create an enabling environment for women's equal participation in decision-making in public life.

2.   The Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women, Mher Margaryan of Armenia, chaired the first round table and made introductory remarks. The Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, Achim Steiner, summarized key messages. Ministers and high-level officials from 18 Member States participated in the first round table. The Minister for Gender Equality and Family of the Republic of Korea, Young-ai Chung, chaired the second round table and made opening comments. Ministers and high-level officials from 15 Member States participated. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, summarized the key messages and made closing remarks.

Recognizing the importance of an enabling environment for women's full and effective participation, particularly in the context of the pandemic

3.   Ministers emphasized the critical importance of creating an enabling environment for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in

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public life so as to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and effectively respond to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

4.   Speakers underscored that the global pandemic has demonstrated the importance of an enabling environment where responsibilities are shared between women and men. The pandemic has resulted in a setback in terms of the gender equality gains of past decades and exacerbated inequalities, while women have borne a disproportionate share of care duties. Ministers elaborated on the rise in the number of cases of violence against women and girls over the past year. Participants also drew attention to the remarkably high number of women carrying out front-line responses while at the same time being threatened by vulnerable job settings and being insufficiently represented in decision-making positions.

5.   Ministers emphasized the need for specific measures to create an enabling environment, free from all forms of violence, to support women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life in order to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

6.   Participants discussed the positive gains made towards a more balanced representation of women in decision-making within local and national governmental bodies, as well as on company boards. They acknowledged that progress is insufficient, and that renewed action and financial commitments across all sectors, institutions and organizations of public life would be required in order to create the necessary enabling environment.

Measures to combat negative social norms, stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes to create an enabling environment

7.   Ministers underscored the importance of addressing the root causes of inequality, namely, persistent negative social norms, gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes which shape public perceptions that women should not play an equal role in public life. They emphasized that negative social norms also affect women's employment and decision-making across many sectors.

8.   Ministers provided positive examples of how to change social norms by addressing stereotypes and biases through education, awareness-raising, and campaigns carried out in partnership with the media and civil society. Participants further stressed the need for greater awareness and action in the education, media and entertainment sectors to combat negative social norms and attitudes towards women and girls.

9.   Speakers recognized that higher levels of poverty, limited opportunities for financial independence, persistent pay gaps, greater care duties and limited access to sexual and reproductive health-care services also impede women's full and effective participation in public life.

10.   Speakers emphasized that more equitable sharing of responsibilities and duties in public and private life is essential for creating an enabling environment for women's participation and decision-making. They highlighted measures that have stimulated shared care responsibilities, such as increased parental leave, greater investment in affordable and long-term child and elder care, better access to social protection, as well as flexible and family-friendly working conditions that reconcile family and work, thereby contributing to a healthier work-life balance.

Best practices in preventing and eliminating violence against women in public life

11.   Ministers emphasized how violence poses a significant obstacle to women's full and effective participation in public life. They drew attention to how violence against

women in public life is perpetuated through intimidation, attacks on personal or familial safety, reputational damage, harassment and other forms, including in the digital context.

12. Speakers underlined the fact that violence has been increasing during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Participants highlighted the growing phenomenon of violence facilitated by digital and information communications technology, including the rise of cyberbullying. They also noted a greater digital divide, which affects marginalized women and girls in particular and risks leaving more women and girls behind. Speakers also underscored the importance of increasing the representation of women in the fields of information communications technology and science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

13. Speakers detailed best practices, such as the establishment of national strategies, awareness-raising campaigns, national helplines, the increased allocation of resources and access to shelters.

Best practices of continuous and systematic efforts to advancing women's full participation and leadership in public and private life

14. Ministers shared numerous examples of how the number of women in elected and appointed positions has increased through the implementation and monitoring of gender-sensitive policies, plans and budgets, setting targets, and through legislation to allow for temporary special measures, including quotas in executive, legislative, judicial and public administrative bodies at the local and national levels. Speakers described efforts to achieve equal representation in various decision-making bodies. Participants called for more affirmative actions to be enshrined in constitutions, laws and policies with a view to increasing the diversity of women who are represented.

15. Speakers also described increases in the representation of women in decision-making in the private sector, within supervisory and executive boards. They also highlighted promising collaborations with key actors in the private sector to increase the number of women at all levels of the workforce as well as stronger gender-equal wage regulations to close persistent pay gaps.

16. Ministers acknowledged the importance of capacity-building and raising the awareness of young women and girls, men and boys through non-discriminatory educational policies and curricula to equip young women to enter the labour market and fight against persistent discrimination. Speakers also discussed progress achieved through mentoring programmes and government-sponsored courses and workshops to prepare women for employment in sectors in which they are traditionally underrepresented.

17. Speakers emphasized the important role of civil society organizations, including youth-led organizations, in advancing the creation of enabling environments and ensuring women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life. Participants noted the growing number of registered non-governmental organizations and their partnership with national authorities. Ministers and high-level officials also emphasized the importance of listening to and investing in women's civil society and grass-roots organizations to help secure a more enabling environment for women's participation and decision-making in public life.

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