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Agenda item 3 (a)

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: 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 (pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution [2022/5](#))

Interactive dialogue: participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

Chair’s summary

1. On 18 March 2025, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive dialogue on progress achieved and immediate steps to be taken to improve the participation of women in public life and ensure transparent, accountable and gender-responsive institutions. The Minister for the Status of Women of Costa Rica, Cindy Quesada Hernández, made an introductory statement and chaired the meeting. A former member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Nicole Ameline, moderated the dialogue.
2. The following guest speakers made opening remarks: Professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, Karolina Gilas; Co-Founder and Director of Strategic Development of the Ukrainian Women’s Fund, Natalia Karbowska; Executive Director of African Women’s Communication and Development Network, Memory Kachambwa; and Deputy Director of Policy and Advocacy of the International Center for Research on Women, Foteini Papagioti. Representatives of 12 Member States and one intergovernmental organization contributed to the dialogue. Five representatives of civil society organizations also provided their views. The dialogue concluded with closing comments by the Vice-Chair.



Increasing women's leadership and political participation

3. Participants noted that, despite progress in increasing the political participation of women and efforts to make State institutions more gender-responsive, the pace of progress remained slow. It was underscored that persistent structural barriers and deeply rooted biases against women continued to hold back progress. Attacks, both online and offline, on women and girls in political and public life, discrimination against women and girls in law, weak institutions and shrinking budget allocations and expenditure all hindered the leadership and political participation of women at all levels, thereby undermining accountability for gender equality.

4. Participants highlighted some of the critical strategies for fostering inclusive and transparent governance. Those included legislative and policy innovations at the local, national and international levels, increased partnerships with civil society, the collection, analysis and dissemination of gender data and the institutionalization of affirmative measures, such as quotas, along with their effective implementation and enforcement through sanctions for non-compliance.

Making State institutions more gender-responsive

5. Gender-responsive institutions are essential for inclusive governance, the robust functioning of democracies and the safeguarding of human rights. These institutions drive gender-responsive initiatives, such as integrating gender analyses into policies and programmes and ensuring diverse representation in decision-making at all levels and in all contexts, including in crises and post-conflict situations where gender considerations must be a fundamental component of recovery processes. However, most of these institutions, including national gender machineries, often lack the authority, capacity and resources necessary to fulfil their mandates.

6. Participants noted that the rules structuring institutions should include legislative strengthening, gender-responsive budgeting and the timely collection and availability of gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data, all of which ensured that public resources were equitably allocated and that policy interventions were informed by evidence. They stressed the importance of embedding gender accountability frameworks within national institutions in order to track progress and ensure compliance with international gender equality commitments.

7. Participants highlighted the critical role of civil society in holding governments accountable in respect of their gender equality commitments and ensuring that public institutions advanced the rights of women and girls in all spheres of life. They called for increased funding for gender equality initiatives, noting that women's organizations currently received less than 1 per cent of the development assistance earmarked for gender equality objectives. Sustainable, flexible and long-term financing was emphasized as key to ensuring the effectiveness and longevity of gender-responsive institutions.

8. Concerns were raised about growing anti-rights movements, rising extremism and shrinking civic space, all of which threatened women's and girls' rights and progress towards gender equality. Strong multi-stakeholder collaboration, political will and intersectional approaches that addressed multiple and compounding forms of discrimination were identified as essential strategies moving forward.

Addressing inequality in decision-making through innovative strategies and frameworks

9. Participants highlighted that gender-responsive foreign policies had emerged as a policy innovation over the past decade and continued to evolve in a variety of national and regional contexts. Such policies had contributed to progress and had

shown potential for accelerated action in three critical areas: promoting equal representation; safeguarding the rights of all women and girls; and allocating dedicated resources to gender equality objectives. Speakers noted that, while major gaps persisted in the latter two areas, the focus of gender-responsive foreign policies on representation had drawn attention to the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership and decision-making roles in the context of diplomacy and global governance. They highlighted the need to strengthen institutions and processes related to foreign affairs in order to ensure equal opportunities for women diplomats, while also giving greater attention to the gendered intersection between career trajectories and care responsibilities.

10. Participants noted that global normative frameworks, such as general recommendation No. 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, continued to set ambitious targets for achieving parity. Representatives of Member States highlighted the steps being taken in their countries to meet parity targets through strategies that addressed inequality in decision-making at all levels. Several speakers listed achievements in relation to the representation of women in national parliaments, diplomatic missions, ministerial positions, public administration and on corporate boards. Many noted significant investments in parity laws, electoral reforms, gender-responsive policies and measures to end violence against women in politics, which deterred women from participating in public life.

11. Civil society organizations stressed the need for an intersectional approach to the development of laws, programmes and policies. They emphasized that the meaningful participation of women in leadership roles and decision-making required the active involvement of women and girls in all their diversity.

The way forward

12. Participants identified the following areas of work that required attention in order to make progress towards equal participation, accountability, leadership and gender-responsive institutions:

- (a) Adopting comprehensive policies and programmes and taking concrete actions to address the persistence of violence against women in politics, including online abuse, as well as the structural and cultural discrimination that hindered the entry of women into the political arena;
- (b) Guaranteeing that women acceded to positions of power after gaining leadership roles, emphasizing the need for both horizontal and vertical parity;
- (c) Taking concrete and effective measures to address the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women and the exclusion of women with disabilities and Indigenous women from leadership and decision-making roles in State institutions;
- (d) Increasing and sustaining the investment of financial and other resources in the promotion of gender equality, including national gender machineries;
- (e) Adopting and implementing comprehensive policies to combat deep-rooted social norms and stereotypes that often prescribed women's roles in society and that could result in their systematic exclusion from political participation;
- (f) Creating accountability systems to ensure that those who upheld discriminatory power structures were held responsible;

(g) Investing in robust data, disaggregated by sex, on women's leadership and political participation, accountability for gender equality commitments and the effectiveness of gender-responsive institutions;

(h) Addressing the persistent disconnect between policy commitments and action to promote the increased participation of women in public life, accountability for gender equality commitments and gender-responsive institutions;

(i) Combating the regression in and backlash against women's and girls' rights, gender equality and inclusive governance systems, which were threatening progress made in political representation and gender-responsive institutions.
