



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/HRC/6/SR.12
26 October 2007

Original: ENGLISH

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 12th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 21 September 2007, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. COSTEA (Romania)

CONTENTS

FOLLOW-UP TO AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VIENNA DECLARATION AND
PROGRAMME OF ACTION (continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Editing Unit, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the public meetings of the Council at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

FOLLOW-UP TO AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VIENNA DECLARATION AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION (agenda item 8) (continued)

Panel discussion on mainstreaming a gender perspective in the work of the Human Rights Council (continued)

1. Ms. NZOMO (Moderator) invited delegations to continue the discussion on gender perspective in the Council's work.
2. Ms. FORERO UCROS (Observer for Colombia) said that gender equality should be strengthened in the field of education through the incorporation of a gender perspective into human rights education programmes and projects, and through the broader dissemination of international declarations, conventions and instruments on the advancement of women and the protection of their rights. Another important aspect of gender equality was the participation of women in decision-making posts. In Colombia, a "women's bench" had been established in Congress in which congresswomen from a variety of political tendencies worked together on initiatives to promote and protect women's rights. The women's bench had drafted legislation to prevent and eradicate violence against women and to criminalize sexual harassment in the workplace. She wished to hear suggestions the panellists might have on how the subjects of women's education and participation could be incorporated into the Council's work.
3. Mr. KIM Pil-woo (Republic of Korea) said that, in order to address the question of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the Council's work, it was first necessary to consider what tools the Council had at its disposal. The Council was equipped with strong institutions and could play a meaningful role in promoting gender-related values and human rights. Given the cross-cutting nature of gender issues, the Council's current review, rationalization and improvement of mandates could either cluster existing thematic special procedures, encourage cooperation and coordination between existing special procedures or, if necessary, create new special procedures.
4. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action emphasized increased cooperation and integration of objectives and goals between the Commission on the Status of Women, the former Commission on Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations agencies. The question was whether the Council could play a leading role in such a group of international organizations and what type of division of labour between the Council and other organizations was most desirable.
5. Ms. MTSHALI (South Africa) said that the Council and all its subsidiary bodies, mechanisms and the treaty body system should endeavour to integrate a gender perspective into their mandates. The universal periodic review mechanism should assess States' progress in advancing gender-related issues and ensuring gender integration in their national policies. The Council should not restrict the subject of gender integration to women's issues. The intersection of gender mainstreaming and the promotion of women's human rights should systematically address the gender perspective as well as the needs of women and men.

6. The South African Constitution provided for both race and gender equality. Although the struggle against apartheid and racial superiority had superseded efforts to combat gender-based discrimination, South Africa had made great strides in reversing the inequality of the past and ensuring that gender balance and women's issues were integrated into political, economic and social life.

7. Mr. SIEBEN (Netherlands) said that human rights could never be fully protected if 50 per cent of the world's population was overlooked. Women and girls still had a more vulnerable position in society than did men and boys and were more likely to be victims of human rights abuses. That was why all available instruments should be used to improve the protection of women's rights. All the special procedures should include a gender perspective in their work. That would provide the Council with a better view of the linkages between the disadvantaged position of women and girls in society, and specific human rights themes. The human rights situation of women must be an integral part of the universal periodic review.

8. Ms. LESCURE (Observer for Panama) said that her delegation wished to participate in the creation of a Council that was flexible, well-structured and capable of meeting the challenges posed by the current international situation. The Panamanian Government and civil society were making major efforts to promote a gender perspective. Although there was a high rate of women's participation in Panama's economic and political life, prejudices about the place of men and women in society persisted. Women still faced greater obstacles than men in finding jobs, and the unemployment rate for women was higher.

9. Political will was necessary to integrate a gender perspective into all aspects of the Council's work, and her delegation supported all initiatives aimed at ensuring respect for women's rights.

10. Ms. ADORMO RAMOS (Brazil), speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, said that, in order to achieve gender equality, it was necessary to promote women's education, ensure respect for their human rights and undertake awareness-raising programmes. Greater efforts must be made to prevent, diagnose and treat sexually transmitted diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, and to guarantee non-discriminatory access to information, care and prevention services. The recognition of women's rights to own property individually and collectively on equal terms with men and to have access to loans and capital was fundamental to their full participation in productive processes and the exercise of their human rights. Gender-based violence was detrimental to the physical and psychological integrity of women, and the international community should endeavour to find ways of eradicating that problem. In its efforts to integrate a gender perspective, the Council should focus its attention on overcoming poverty, which afflicted millions of women throughout the world. In that regard, she stressed the importance of recognizing the economic value of women's non-remunerated work, both in and outside the home.

11. Mr. OMER LEBBE (Sri Lanka), speaking on behalf of the Group of Asian States, said that the integration of a gender perspective was one of the main principles in the universal periodic review and was also recognized under the special procedures. In electing members of its Advisory Committee and appointing members of the Working Group on Communications and the Working Group on Situations, the Council should give due consideration to gender balance.

12. Ms. PHUMAS (Observer for Thailand) said that it was time for the Council to give serious consideration to gender mainstreaming and integration. The Council should develop a sustained and systematic mechanism to ensure that the gender perspective was broadly integrated in practical terms. The universal periodic review could be used to assess States' implementation of measures to ensure gender equality. Mandate-holders, all stakeholders, United Nations bodies and specialized agencies should consider how to integrate the gender perspective in their work.

13. She asked the panellists whether the Special Procedures Coordination Committee or the Women's Rights and Gender Unit of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had developed any systematic means of gathering information or statistics on how the gender perspective had been integrated into established mandates or into the work of the current mandate-holders. It would be useful to know what challenges mandate-holders faced in integrating the gender perspective.

14. Ms. ADORMO RAMOS (Brazil) said that the Council should take account of the gender perspective when it considered issues on its agenda and developed its methods of work. On the basis of her country's experience in integrating gender into policies and programmes, she believed it was possible to improve the gender balance within the United Nations human rights system. The participation of civil society in the current initiative helped to raise awareness of the need to reinforce the gender perspective in the institution-building process. She asked the panellists how the issue of violence against women in all its forms could be included in the work of the Council, and how the Council could benefit from examples of good practices already in place in some countries.

15. Ms. MUDIE (Observer for Australia) said that the United Nations should ensure that the renewed emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment translated into effective action. In its report (A/61/583), the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment had recommended creating a consolidated, independent body focused on gender equality and women's empowerment. Such a body would provide revitalized leadership on those issues and help to strengthen the coherence and impact of the United Nations institutional gender architecture. However, it was important that effective gender mainstreaming should remain the responsibility of the entire United Nations system.

16. The Council should work closely with States, specialized agencies and other stakeholders to ensure that gender equality was an integral part of its work and the work of its subsidiary bodies. Gender equality should be built into the Council's institutional processes, particularly the universal periodic review, the review of mandates and the ongoing work of the special procedures. In order to ensure the effectiveness of gender-mainstreaming efforts, the Council should develop clear prioritization, monitoring and evaluation strategies. Her delegation endorsed the view that the time had come to move from normative work to implementation of women's rights and gender issues, which necessarily involved the introduction of effective monitoring and evaluation.

17. Ms. KHVAN (Russian Federation) said that the Council should develop clear and specific guidelines for integrating a gender perspective into its work. The special procedures should also

adopt approaches that took due account of the gender perspective. The current gender structure of the United Nations was not sufficiently effective and coherent. Failure to coordinate activities sometimes led to duplication of work, dissipation of resources, and confusion of priorities. The establishment of a single entity for women's issues would help to systematize efforts and consolidate action. Before taking any decisions in the area of gender perspectives, the Council should await the conclusion of the General Assembly's discussion of that issue. The Council's current discussion should facilitate the coordination of action and the implementation of a unified policy on women throughout the United Nations system.

18. Mr. BITETTO GAVILANES (Observer for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the Council's efforts to integrate the gender perspective into its work required the support of all relevant actors at all levels. With its new mechanisms and those inherited from the former Commission, the Council had an excellent opportunity to implement commitments in that area. His delegation fully supported the work of the panel, which should be followed up in subsequent sessions.

19. Mr. BARARUNYERETSE (International Organization of la Francophonie) said that his organization attached importance to mainstreaming the gender perspective. Its plans for the period 2006-2008 included eliminating the obstacles to the full participation of women in all aspects of public and private life; combating the feminization of poverty; strengthening national capacities to implement gender equality policies; and eliminating gender-based violence. His organization would cooperate with the Council in its ongoing efforts to mainstream the gender perspective.

20. Ms. CHAGAS (Action Canada for Population and Development) said that her organization supported efforts to incorporate the gender perspective into the work of the special procedures. Integration of the gender perspective entailed the examination of the intersection between various forms of inequality and discrimination, such as race, ethnic origin, age, disability, socio-economic status, health, migratory status, sexual orientation, religion and culture. In that regard, her organization commended the cooperation between special rapporteurs on the intersections between their mandates; there should be more such initiatives in the work of the special procedures. Efforts should be made to resolve the current shortcomings in protection. She asked the panel to recommend practical ways of increasing the capacity of current and future mandate-holders to incorporate the gender perspective into their work.

21. Ms. MEAN (Femmes Africa Solidarité) said that a critical step in integrating a gender perspective was to ensure that there was a gender balance in the structure of the Council. Gender balance should be accompanied by gender mainstreaming in policy and programmes; that required the prompt implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action, the Millennium Development Goals and other international instruments that promoted the status of women. It was also necessary to accelerate the process of protecting women's human rights on the basis of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Strong gender integration in the Council would facilitate the implementation of all the national and international instruments to promote and protect the human rights of women. She asked the panel how consultation with relevant NGOs at the regional level could be ensured in the preparation of reports under the universal periodic review, and how the work of NGOs and the Council could be mutually reinforcing.

22. Mr. KOHLI (International Institute for Non-Aligned Studies) said that gender-related issues were embedded in poverty, social violence and militarism. War and injustice illuminated certain gender perspectives, particularly the denial of women's human rights and the legitimizing of women as targets of violence. The many international instruments, mechanisms and domestic laws that promoted women's rights would have little impact without gender mainstreaming. Crimes against women, such as forced marriage, exploitation, domestic violence, sexual violence, and female genital mutilation, were increasing. There was a pressing need for the Council to integrate the gender perspective into its programmes and procedures. Gender-related issues should be included on the Council's agenda as an independent item.

23. Ms. VADER (Bahá'í International Community) said that, in order for women to be able to participate fully in world affairs, they must be given an adequate level of education and opportunities to make use of their skills. With the requisite tools, women would be able to make unique contributions to the establishment of a just world order. The equality of men and women should be understood as an essential aspect of the oneness of humanity; that would require changes in individual behaviour, organizational structures and interpersonal dynamics. The Council should take measures to ensure the full participation of women in all debates.

24. Ms. KANG (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that there was close coordination on gender mainstreaming between OHCHR and its field offices. Programmatic activities were currently being implemented in Colombia, Nepal, the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in other States in accordance with specific needs. A study on how to measure the degree to which the gender perspective had been integrated into the work of the special procedures was currently in the planning stage. Specific programmes were also being planned with different mandate-holders.

25. Ms. COOMARASWAMY (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict), commenting on a point raised by the representative of South Africa and reiterated by several NGOs, said that there was a need for gender to intersect with other issues, particularly the issues of race and economic origin. Intersectionality of race and gender was central to the planning for the follow-up to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Replying to a question by the representative of the Russian Federation, she said that gender architecture was being discussed by the General Assembly, and the Council should be aware of the issues raised in that discussion. The Women's Rights and Gender Unit of OHCHR had an important role to play in monitoring the gender perspective; perhaps it could begin by monitoring the integration of the gender perspective into the work of the special procedures.

26. Mr. KOTHARI (Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living) said that one area of particular concern to the special procedures was the gap between countries' recognition of women's rights and their adoption of measures to promote the exercise of those rights. As part of universal periodic review, countries should consider ways of closing that gap. It was important to identify institutional gaps at the national and international levels, as well as areas for international cooperation in the promotion of women's rights.

27. Ms. GALLEGOS (Nicaragua) said that women accounted for a high percentage of the world's poorest and most marginalized sectors of the population; they continued to have few rights, resources or opportunities. The integration of the gender perspective required continuous monitoring and leadership, and her delegation welcomed the idea that the universal periodic review should include a special section reflecting the Economic and Social Council's strategy on mainstreaming the gender perspective. She agreed that the Council's programme of work should include an annual discussion on the human rights of women and on the integration of the gender perspective into all the Council's work and mechanisms. Her delegation welcomed the establishment of the Women's Rights and Gender Unit in OHCHR.

28. Ms. NYBERG (Observer for Finland) said that her delegation strongly supported the comprehensive integration of a gender perspective in the Council's work. As it completed the institution-building process, the Council had a good opportunity to ensure that the gender perspective and the human rights of both women and men would be taken into account in its work. She wished to hear views on how to address multiple forms of discrimination when integrating gender into the work of the Council. The Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living should explain how the systematic integration of the gender perspective into the work of the special procedures could be improved. She enquired how the Council could make better use of civil society's expertise in its efforts to integrate the gender perspective.

29. Ms. TELLIER (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that Council resolution 5/1 clearly supported the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into the work of the Council and the special procedures, and its inclusion as part of the universal periodic review. In that regard, UNFPA intended to contribute to the implementation of gender mainstreaming on the basis of its three interrelated areas of work, which were to collect and analyse population data; support reproductive health and rights; and promote gender equality. The work of UNFPA on maternal mortality and gender-based violence was an example of how the Council could mainstream gender considerations in its work. The Council should systematically identify such issues as maternal mortality and gender-based violence as human rights concerns and should include indicators and actively seek data, especially gender-disaggregated data, in all monitoring mechanisms, including universal periodic review.

30. Mr. MULUGETA ABEBE (Observer for Ethiopia) said that gender mainstreaming should take account of the needs of African women. The Council could provide for regional specificities only by encouraging, in its work and activities, regional human rights systems. The Council's special procedures and bodies needed to find ways and means of working with such regional systems. It was also incumbent on the Council to make explicit reference to gender issues in enabling resolutions whenever it reviewed mandates. The special procedures should be encouraged to take a gender perspective into account when implementing their mandates, and include in their reports information on, and qualitative analysis of, the rights of women and girls.

31. Mr. MOKTAR (Malaysia) said that the Council should be at the forefront of United Nations efforts to promote gender equality. Because of its commitment to mainstreaming gender into its domestic development and social policies, Malaysia was prepared to work with other interested delegations on gender issues. He asked how the Council could best ensure that its work was consistent with the wider gender reform at the regional and international levels.

32. Mr. TRIVEDI (India) said that the Council had an important role to play in promoting gender equality and guaranteeing the rights of women and girls. The Council and its mechanisms, including the universal periodic review, should encourage and support efforts to empower women. States and other stakeholders should be encouraged to provide information on women's empowerment as part of universal periodic review and the outcome of universal periodic review should identify practical steps to empower women and achieve the full realization of their rights. A similar approach should also be adopted by special procedures mandate-holders, particularly when undertaking country visits. In its programme of work, the Council should allocate sufficient time for discussions of women's rights and gender mainstreaming.

33. Mr. HAIDARA (Senegal) said that Senegal attached particular importance to gender issues. Africa's keen interest in women's rights had been reaffirmed at the third African Union Summit in 2004 and reflected in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Gender balance had been introduced in the Commission of the African Union and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. In its efforts to integrate the gender perspective into its work, the Council should take inspiration from African examples.

34. Ms. DUONG (Switzerland) said that, in the context of the universal periodic review, reporting States should be encouraged to share lessons learned and best practices regarding the effects of their domestic human rights policies. She asked the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights how States could be encouraged to integrate relevant gender aspects into their reports.

35. A checklist of the Council's resolutions and decisions on crucial gender issues should be available for States planning to submit a draft resolution or decision to the Council, in order to ensure that the drafts were prepared in a gender-sensitive manner. In that regard, she asked how States could be encouraged to make systematic use of existing guidelines developed by civil society.

36. The special procedures should take into account the effects on women, girls, men and boys of the human rights policies and situations in the countries they visited. They should also include gender-relevant information and recommendations in all their reports. The mandate-holders should be given access to persons and groups that could provide that type of information. She asked the panellists how the Council could ensure that mandate-holders took a gender-sensitive approach in their work.

37. Mr. SHALABY (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that gender mainstreaming was a long-term process and a part of continuing efforts throughout the United Nations system. The Council should therefore pursue such efforts in a coherent and coordinated manner with the relevant United Nations bodies, since the principles for mainstreaming a gender perspective in the United Nations system were also applicable to the Council. While the current discussion was not intended to yield a specific outcome, it provided a valuable opportunity for initiating the process of identifying the general parameters for addressing gender mainstreaming in the Council. He looked forward to the mainstreaming of a

gender perspective into the Council's various mechanisms, particularly the universal periodic review mechanism. The panellists should assess the effectiveness of the approach that had been used to mainstream the gender perspective into the United Nations system, and how it could be developed.

38. Mr. RAHMAN (Bangladesh) said that gender mainstreaming was not an end in itself, but an approach or a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. It seemed that there was still a lack of clarity on what gender mainstreaming entailed. Some people tended to equate gender mainstreaming with gender balance. Gender mainstreaming concerned identifying and addressing gender perspectives in the Council's work, while gender balance was concerned with ensuring balance between women and men, for example in staffing. While those two areas of work were clearly interrelated, they were quite separate in practice. At the same time, there was a continuing need to complement gender mainstreaming with targeted interventions to promote gender balance. A quota system was a good introductory mechanism that could serve as a catalyst for the implementation of consistent public policies aimed at redressing the power imbalance.

39. The United Nations was making efforts to develop its capacity to address gender perspectives, and many United Nations bodies had established institutional arrangements to support gender mainstreaming. However, the situation on the ground was not changing quickly, perhaps because the focus was more on structure than on action. He asked whether a more streamlined approach in the United Nations system and greater synergy among the mechanisms was necessary for gender mainstreaming.

40. Mr. LAURA (Commission to Study the Organization of Peace) said that, 14 years after the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the universality of human rights in many parts of the world was a formal rather than an applied universality. The universality of human rights must repose, in practical terms, in each and every person as a human being.

41. Ms. BARCIA (International Service for Human Rights) said that the institution-building process provided the Council with many opportunities to integrate gender into its work. One specific measure that the Council could take was to renew and strengthen the mandates of the special procedures whose work was relevant to women's rights, particularly that of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights defenders. The Special Representative supported the international campaign on women human rights defenders, and had taken action in many cases of violations of women activists' rights. The Council should ensure that States took concrete measures to create an environment in which women human rights defenders could carry out their activities.

42. Ms. DUARTE (World Organization Against Torture) said that, for the past 20 years, his organization had endeavoured to ensure that mandate-holders and treaty body experts took account of the role of gender in the torture and ill-treatment of women. There were certain complementarities between the treaty-monitoring bodies and the special procedures in the area of gender integration, which might help to shape any mainstreaming strategy to be adopted as part of the universal periodic review. For example, the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture had highlighted the intentionally discriminatory aspect of female genital mutilation, which allowed it to qualify as torture when the State failed to act, while the Human Rights Committee

and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had adopted general comments requiring States parties to report on measures to combat domestic violence and harmful traditional practices that might amount to torture or ill-treatment. She hoped that the Council would make full use of such instruments in strengthening its gender integration strategy.

43. Ms. AGREBI (Association Tunisienne des Mères) said that the promotion and protection of women's rights depended in large part on the promotion of equal representation. The underrepresentation of half the population in decision-making was a real shortcoming of democracy. The promotion of equal representation in all United Nations bodies should be part of a process that involved the entire international community in drawing up a plan of action to combat all discrimination, exclusion and intolerance.

44. Ms. NZOMO (Moderator) invited the panellists to reply to comments and questions.

45. Ms. KANG (Deputy United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), replying to the representative of Switzerland, said that member States would be encouraged to consult closely with the gender machinery and women's groups in their own countries at the very start of their preparations for reporting under the universal periodic review. It was important to remember that the review was a peer review process and that it was ultimately up to member States to integrate the gender perspective into the Council's mechanisms. She agreed that mainstreaming strategies had not been effective; the use of the term "integration" reflected a desire for greater effectiveness in bringing gender into the mainstream of the work of the United Nations system as a whole. The new gender machinery would ensure closer coordination between those engaged in gender-related work and raise the profile of their work. However, its effectiveness would depend on the availability of additional human and financial resources.

46. Ms. COOMARASWAMY (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict) said that, in dealing with multiple discrimination, mandate-holders must adopt an approach that allowed them to examine the interaction between the various forms of discrimination. Replying to the representative of Switzerland, she said that the special procedures should not only consider how the issues raised under their mandate affected women as a group but also take measures to incorporate women's issues into their work. It appeared that the concept of gender integration had been widely accepted; the current task was to put that concept into practice.

47. Mr. KOTHARI (Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living) said that the Council should encourage special rapporteurs to cooperate more closely with the various United Nations agencies and treaty bodies involved with women's issues and urge all Governments to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The special procedures' dialogue with treaty bodies and assistance with standard-setting had been ad hoc initiatives undertaken either by those special procedures or at the request of the committees themselves. The Council should consider formalizing such cooperation between different parts of the United Nations system. The special procedures could be requested to include in their reports a self-assessment of their own integration of the gender perspective into their work, as well as suggestions on how the Council and OHCHR could help them improve.

48. While the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures had not yet considered how the special procedures integrated gender into their work, it would welcome the opportunity for dialogue with the Council on follow-up to the recommendations arising from the panel discussion.

49. Regional consultations had been very valuable in his own work, and he suggested that the Council should adopt a similar mechanism. Regional consultations could also be a source of information for the universal periodic review. The Advisory Committee could be requested to assist special rapporteurs with research studies that had been requested but for which capacity was lacking.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.