

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session
27 February –9 March 2012

Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls

Moderator's summary

1. On 29 February 2012, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an expert panel on “Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls” to provide an opportunity to discuss issues to be considered in preparation for the priority theme of the Commission in 2013. Ms. Irina Velichko, Vice-Chair of the Commission, moderated the discussion. The panelists were: Dr. Nduku Kilonzo, Liverpool VCT, Kenya; Ms. Marai Larasi, End Violence against Women Coalition, United Kingdom; Dr. Margarita Quintanilla, PATH/InterCambios, Nicaragua. Ms. Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), made closing remarks. Representatives from Member States, regional intergovernmental bodies and civil society contributed to the discussion.
2. Panelists’ presentations focused on the provision of services for victims/survivors of violence, and primary prevention. Participants identified questions and issues, summarized below, that should be further examined in the preparations for the fifty-seventh session of the Commission. They stressed that all stakeholders should take concrete measures to accelerate prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, and monitor and evaluate the impact of measures taken and of results achieved in the areas of both service provision and of primary prevention.
3. Speakers confirmed that violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world, rooted in structural gender inequality and discrimination. Country data reveals that as many as seven in ten women report experiencing physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime. Despite increased global commitment to address the issue, challenges to preventing and eliminating such violence persist, such as limited resources, impunity of perpetrators and barriers to victims/survivors’ access to services, justice and effective reparations. The theme of the preparatory panel therefore centered on services and prevention, in order to facilitate the identification of especially critical gaps, strategic directions and promising practices that can better guarantee quality support and access to justice for women and girls subjected to gender-based violence; as well as assist in charting a course of action for reducing, and eventually eliminating all forms of violence against women and its impact for future generations.
4. Given the devastating costs and consequences of violence against women for the victims/survivors, as well as to societies and economies and its impact on many aspects of national development, ending violence against women and girls must be addressed in a dedicated manner through holistic and multi-sectoral approaches. In addition, such efforts must also be integrated across national policies, plans and budgets aimed at achieving

developmental goals, such as those related to poverty reduction, health (including reproductive health, prevention of maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS), education, and economic development, among other areas. While the State has the primary role in ending violence against women and girls, this task is a shared societal responsibility.

Provision of support services

5. Notable progress has been made in providing support services to women and girls victims/survivors of violence, building on the pioneering work of women's and other non-governmental organizations that have historically been at the forefront of service provision in many countries. However, service provision often receives inadequate support and funding, and as such, services remain limited in quality, scope and coverage. Furthermore, in many cases commodities and supplies, such as those needed for examining and treating injuries or drugs for preventing pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, are not available. Access to such services can be especially problematic for women in rural and remote areas, or women from marginalized groups, such as those belonging to ethnic minorities, indigenous and migrant women, victims/survivors of trafficking in persons, adolescent girls, and those with disabilities or living with HIV/AIDS. Better approaches need to be developed to reach such populations.
6. A rights-based and gender-sensitive approach to the provision of support services is required. Services should respond to different manifestations of violence. They should be tailored accordingly so as to meet the diverse needs and rights of victims/survivors, including those subjected to multiple forms of discrimination.
7. Communities have a critical role in responding to violence against women and girls. In order to enhance community responses to violence, there is a need for greater involvement of community and local leaders that have not traditionally assumed a visible and public role in addressing violence against women and girls. At the same time, the essential work carried out by grassroots and women's organizations in the delivery of services needs to be fully recognized, with special emphasis on the need to guarantee the safety of persons supporting survivors.
8. There are different models for service provision, such as through one-stop centers or through integrated services. In all cases, it is important to avoid 'one size fits all' approaches. In practice, the decision should not be one of 'either/or', but an optimal combination of service modalities tailored to local contexts. More work is needed to develop and make available such optimal combinations.
9. Training of service providers is important to increase the quality of care. However, efforts in this area are generally fragmented and not institutionalized. There are a range of steps that can be taken to strengthen capacities for service delivery, such as the inclusion of pre-service training in national curricula and the issuance of guidelines and protocols. Such efforts need to clearly differentiate between general sensitization and specialized training for service providers. Good practices exist and can serve as basis for further improvements.

10. Limited coordination across sectors remains a barrier to the delivery of quality services. In this respect, experience shows that the designation of a central institution with the authority to coordinate different sectors and stakeholders and harmonize service delivery and national reporting frameworks strengthens delivery and enhances accountability. The expertise and knowledge of specialized non-governmental organizations should be drawn upon, and supported. Increased coordination and consultation with and among civil society and private sector actors that provide services is also needed. Gender-based violence should be established as a priority for service delivery within and across sectors, including health, judicial and security, among others.
11. Strengthened coordination is also essential for improving monitoring and evaluation of support services. The absence of commonly used local and national indicators to guide the development of data collection tools and measure the effectiveness of services delivery approaches remains a persistent challenge. Due to the dearth of financial resources, research and evidence gathering on the impact of service delivery remains limited, thus hampering the replication and scaling-up of potentially successful models.

Primary prevention

12. Although some advances have been made in the provision of support services to victims/survivors, primary prevention is an area where much work remains to be done. Given the significant costs to the health, social and economic well-being of individuals, families, communities and societies, preventing violence from occurring in the first place is an imperative. Investments in primary prevention hold the potential for high social and economic development returns, as well as cost-effectiveness. Investments in primary prevention initiatives should not be diverted from already low-resourced support services. Such investments should also include a focus on monitoring and evaluation of existing primary prevention initiatives, to expand the limited, though growing, body of evidence on effective approaches in particular contexts. Good practices and a better understanding of prevention efforts can help in expanding this necessary area of work.
13. Awareness-raising initiatives are an important starting point for primary prevention efforts, but are insufficient to achieve social transformative change. A systematic and sustained approach to prevention is urgently required. This entails working with girls and boys from an early age, including through 'whole-school' programmes, which integrate prevention of violence against women and girls into the curriculum, into the entire learning environment and the wider community. The 'whole-school' approach supports leadership and development across the school and embeds gender equality and zero tolerance of violence against women and girls into its everyday operations, including through the involvement of adults, such as mothers and fathers and other family and community members, to serve as role models.
14. Given the role of media and popular culture in shaping gender roles, it is essential to engage media and entertainment industries in preventing violence against women, promoting gender equality and addressing gender stereotypes, including the sexualization and objectification of women in the media. Communication for social change can help in

transforming stereotyped attitudes and behaviour patterns. New technologies, social media and social networking tools hold particular promise for such efforts. Limited expertise and capacities, and appropriate tools and methodologies, in the area of effective communications for social change and prevention, remain important challenges and require sustained attention for achieving progress.

15. Programmes in different settings intended at transforming attitudes demonstrate that primary prevention of violence against women and girls is possible, as shown from promising practices including in low and middle income countries. In this respect, South-South and North-South cooperation can facilitate the exchange of promising practices. These include multi-faceted media and community mobilization initiatives, engaging men and boys and school-based programmes aimed at shifting peoples' attitudes. These experiences can serve as basis for further interventions.
16. Participants raised a number of additional issues to be considered in preparation for the priority theme in 2013. Among them were: the need to address new forms of violence against women and girls, for example those resulting from migration, and organized crime in particular trafficking in persons; torture by non-state actors; fear, shame and stigmatization surrounding the disclosure of violence against women and girls and ways for effectively overcoming these and for promoting help-seeking behaviours where services are available; effective approaches for re-integrating perpetrators and preventing recurrence of violence; the role and responsibilities of the military and uniformed personnel in preventing violence against women and girls; effective measures and approaches to reconcile customary laws and practices with the human rights of women, and with formal legal and policy frameworks.
17. Attention was drawn to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the 'Istanbul Convention'), adopted in 2011. This Convention is a legally binding instrument that requires the implementation of a comprehensive set of measures to address violence against women and girls, covering primary prevention and support services.