

WOMEN'S COMMISSION ADOPTS AGREED CONCLUSIONS ON MEDIA, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES, TEXTS ON AFGHANISTAN, PALESTINIAN WOMEN, HIV/AIDS

The Commission on the Status of Women today adopted by consensus its draft- agreed conclusions on one of the two themes of its current session -- women's access to the media and information and communication technologies. It deferred, however, action on conclusions for its second theme, violence against women, until a later date.

Under the agreed conclusions adopted today, the Commission agreed that increasing women's access to and participation in the media and information and communication technologies was vital for women's empowerment. It urged governments, United Nations bodies, international financial institutions and civil society to integrate gender perspectives and ensure women's full participation in national policies, legislation, programmes, and regulatory and technical instruments in information and communication technologies and media and communications. Such bodies should also enable equal access for women to information and communication technologies-based economic activities, such as small business and home-based employment, to information systems and improved technologies, and to new employment opportunities.

They should respect different and local languages, local knowledge systems, and locally produced content in media and communications, and increase efforts to compile, and disaggregate by sex and age, statistics on information and communication technologies use, as well as to develop gender-specific indicators on information and communication technologies use and needs. Welcoming the convening of the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Geneva in December 2003 and in Tunis in 2005, the text also urged its participants to consider the Commission's recommendations and integrate gender perspectives into every facet of the Summit. It encouraged women, gender equality experts and women information and communication technologies experts, national delegations, as well as civil society and the business community, to attend the Summit.

During the meeting, the Commission also adopted or approved three draft resolutions concerning Afghanistan, Palestine, and HIV/AIDS. By the terms of an amended draft adopted on women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS, the Commission urged governments to empower women and increase their economic independence, so they could protect themselves from HIV/AIDS. Further to that text, the Commission called on governments to increase efforts to combat gender stereotypes and inequalities as they related to HIV/AIDS. It also called on them to make the necessary resources available, particularly from donor countries and national budgets, in line with the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. In a recorded vote of 38 in favor to 1 against (United States) with no abstentions, the Commission also approved a text on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women. By that text, the Economic and Social Council would call on Israel to ease the return of all refugees and displaced Palestinian women and children to their homes and properties. It would further call on the international community to continue providing urgently needed assistance in alleviating the dire humanitarian crisis Palestinian women and their families faced, and help reconstruct Palestinian institutions.

By the third approved draft, on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, the Council would urge the Afghan Transitional Authority to: ensure that all legislative and other measures supported full human rights for women and girls; enable women and girls full, equal and effective participation in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life; and protect the right to freedom of movement, expression and association for women and girls. It would also urge the Afghan Authority to ensure the equal right of women and girls to education, the effective functioning of schools throughout the country, and the admission of women and girls to all levels of education; and reaffirm the equal right of women to own land and other property through the right to inheritance, as well as carry out reforms to give women equal rights to credit, capital and appropriate technologies. The Commission also adopted an oral resolution on communications concerning the status of women. By the text, the Commission decided that it would continue to consider the future work of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women at its forty-eighth session, and requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report for that purpose, bearing in mind the preliminary discussion that took place at the forty-seventh session of the Commission, and seeking the written views of Member States in that regard. The Commission then appointed the members of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women for the forty-eighth session. Based on nominations by the representatives of the regional groups, Ishtiaq Andrabi (Pakistan) and Mariane Davtyan (Armenia) were appointed. The appointment of the three remaining members of the Working Group was deferred to the Commission's forty-eighth session. During the action taken by the Commission, the following representatives explained their votes and their

positions: United States, Morocco (on behalf of the “Group of 77” developing countries and China), Israel, Brazil, Russian Federation, Benin, Congo, Chile, Iran, Egypt, Sudan, and Pakistan.

The observer for Palestine also spoke. The Commission will reconvene at a date to be announced to conclude its forty-seventh session. Background The Commission on the Status of Women met this afternoon to conclude its forty-seventh session. It was expected to take action on its draft-agreed conclusions, its report and draft resolutions concerning women and girls in Afghanistan and Palestine, women and the HIV/AIDS virus, and communications concerning the status of women. The Commission was also expected to adopt its agenda and appoint members of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women for the forty-eighth session. Draft Resolutions The Commission had before it a draft resolution on women, the girl child and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) (document E/CN.6/2003/L.2/Rev.2). By the draft, the Commission would urge governments to empower women and increase their economic independence, so they could protect themselves from HIV/AIDS. Further to the text, the Commission would call on governments to increase efforts to combat gender stereotypes and inequalities as they related to HIV/AIDS. It would also call on them to make the necessary resources available, particularly from donor countries and national budgets, in line with the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. In addition, the Commission would call for enhanced efforts to include a gender perspective in developing HIV/AIDS programmes and policies, and in training personnel for such programmes, which would include focusing on the role of men and boys in addressing HIV/AIDS. It would also invite the Secretary-General to consider the gender perspective in his reports on HIV/AIDS.

Also before the Commission was a draft resolution on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (document E/CN.6/2003/L.1). According to the draft, the Economic and Social Council would reaffirm that Israeli occupation was a major obstacle for Palestinian women in their advancement, self-reliance and integration into development planning. Further to the text, the Council would call on Israel to ease the return of all refugees and displaced Palestinian women and children to their homes and properties. It would also call on the international community to continue providing urgently needed assistance in alleviating the dire humanitarian crisis Palestinian women and their families faced, and help reconstruct Palestinian institutions. Another draft resolution before the Commission was on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan (document E/CN.6/2003/L.4/Rev.1). Under the draft, the Economic and Social Council would urge the Afghan Transitional Authority to ensure that all legislative and other measures support full human rights for women and girls; enable women and girls full, equal and effective participation in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life; and protect the right to freedom of movement, expression and association for women and girls. In addition, the Council would urge the Afghan Authority to support the Ministry of Women's Affairs, so that it can promote gender equality; affirm full support for women's participation in the constitutional process and the Constitutional Loya Jirga; and improve the practices of law enforcers when dealing with women victims of violence, particularly those accused of offences based on tradition. It would also urge the Afghan Authority to ensure the equal right of women and girls to education, the effective functioning of schools throughout the country, and the admission of women and girls to all levels of education; and reaffirm the equal right of women to own land and other property through the right to inheritance, as well as carry out reforms to give women equal rights to credit, capital and appropriate technologies.

The Commission also had before it a draft resolution on communications concerning the status of women (document E/CN.6/2003/L.8), by which it would decide to continue considering the future work of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women at its forty-eighth session. To assist that process, it would also request the Secretary-General to submit a report providing insights on existing communications mechanisms on women within the United Nations. According to the text, the report would analyse the number, type, subject matter and sources of communications received by concerned bodies in the past five years; elaborate the mandate, authority and scope of each mechanism; include the types of complaints which could not be addressed by existing mechanisms; and outline possibilities for channelling communications from the Division for the Advancement of Women to other United Nations mechanisms, as well as procedures which would be able to address those communications effectively. Also before the Commission was an amendment to the above draft (document E/CN.6/2003/L.9). Action The Commission first adopted without a vote, as orally amended, a resolution on women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS (document E/CN.6/2003/L.2/Rev.2). It then approved the resolution on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan (document E/CN.6/2003/L.4/Rev.1). Explanations of Vote After the approval of the resolution on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, the representative of the United States said the time had come to remove the resolution from consideration by the Commission. The United States had provided enormous support to women in Afghanistan before and after the end of the Taliban regime.

There had been considerable improvements for women and girls in Afghanistan, and the United States felt that this resolution was no longer appropriate. Country resolutions were rare in the Commission, and since the Taliban no longer ruled, the new Government must be given a chance to improve the situation further. The Commission then adopted its draft-agreed conclusions on participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women. BIRGIT STEVENS (Belgium), Vice-Chairperson of the Commission and facilitator of the draft-agreed conclusions, said the conclusions contained recommendations on new technologies in connection with women and information and communication technologies. She hoped the text would contribute to the integration of women into the technological world. The representative of Morocco, speaking on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, said the conclusions were a positive and appreciated result. They contained several innovative elements, which she hoped would increasingly involve women in the information and communication technologies world. The conclusions also contained clear recommendations that could be sent to the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society. Before the vote on the resolution on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the representative of Israel expressed his opposition to the draft resolution. While Palestinian women deserved protection, other women also deserved protection. Did not Israeli women deserve protection from terror? he asked. One could suggest that there were innumerable cases worldwide that were far more deserving of the attention of the Commission than the topic of this draft resolution. The politically motivated resolution threatened the credibility of the Commission, and he called on members to oppose the resolution in order to protect the Commission's credibility.

The representative of Brazil condemned acts of violence taking place in the Middle East. Brazil believed that disproportionate acts of violence threatened a peaceful solution to the crisis in the region. It seemed intransigence hampered relevant progress in the peace process, which must be based on relevant Security Council resolutions. The representative of the Russian Federation said he supported the draft. However, operative paragraph 4 was a concern to his delegation. Even though the Russian Federation would vote in favour of the draft, he believed that the paragraph in question was not sufficiently balanced. In a vote of 38 in favour to 1 against (United States), the Commission then adopted a resolution on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (document E/CN.6/2003/L.1). After the vote, the representative of the United States said that he was deeply concerned about the impact of the current crisis on Palestinian women and added that the United States was the largest single donor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) providing assistance to Palestinian women. At the same time, the United States grieved for Israeli women who had suffered and died as a result of Palestinian suicide-bombers. In addition, the resolution's content went far beyond the mandate and objectives of the Commission. A peaceful solution to the situation must be negotiated between the two States involved. The observer for Palestine thanked all delegations who had voted for the resolution. She also expressed gratitude to the Group of 77 and China for their continuous support over the years. Palestinian women were the only women in the world who were still suffering from occupation, which was why the Commission had given their situation priority. The representative of Benin apologized for their absence during the voting, but had they been presented they would have voted in favour. The representative of the Congo said that her vote had not been reflected in the voting sheet and asked for the record to show that Benin had voted in favour of the resolution. The representative of Morocco, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, thanked delegations supporting the resolution. Action The Commission then adopted an oral resolution on communications concerning the status of women. By its terms, the Commission decided that it, at its forty-eighth session, would continue to consider the future work of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women, and requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report for that purpose, bearing in mind the preliminary discussion that took place at the forty-seventh session of the Commission and seeking the written views of Member States in that regard.

The previous resolution on the topic (document E/CN.6/2003/L.8) and its amendment (document E/CN.6/2003/L.9) were withdrawn. After adoption of the oral text, the representative of Chile said that future discussions must take into account the comments of the Chair of the Working Group on the difficulties faced in its work. FERNANDO ESTELLITA LINS DE SALVO COIMBRA, Vice-Chairperson of the Commission and facilitator during the informal consultations, introduced the draft-agreed conclusions entitled "Women's human rights and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly". He said it was the result of extensive negotiations held during the last two weeks, addressing the crucial issue of elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. The document was a step towards the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. Before action on the draft agreement, the representative of Iran said the text would contribute to the

international community in its collective efforts in combating violence against women. His delegation agreed to all parts of the draft, except paragraph 5(0), the language of which could not be accepted. The representatives of Egypt and the Sudan agreed with the statement made by the representative of Iran. The representative of the Sudan hoped that the issue could be resolved by lifting language from other proposals. The representative of Pakistan said the Commission could adopt the paragraphs on which there was consensus and drop paragraphs on which there was disagreement. He suggested that delegations disagreeing could flag their reservations for the record. The representative of Iran said the text was supposed to be an agreed conclusion. That would be the first time that reservations were used in draft- agreed resolutions.

Since there was no agreement on the issue, the Chair declared that there could be no agreed conclusions. The representative of Brazil raised a point of order, defending the document and said that if any delegation objected to the conclusions, that delegation would have to object formally. Effort had been put into the document and something needed to be done. The representative of Iran said his delegation could not present any reservations to the paragraph in question since there was nothing wrong with it, per se. Iran wanted the paragraph in question to be complemented by another sentence, a proposal that had been rejected by other delegations. The text as a whole was important, and even without that one paragraph, the international community could combat violence against women. The draft-agreed conclusions were adopted and delegations objecting were advised to make their reservations clear in the text. After the adoption, the representative of Iran said that the Chair had disregarded correct procedures. The Chair had already said there were to be no agreed conclusions, and then he had changed his mind. Were these the rules of procedure for the United Nations? he asked. The representative of the United States objected to the procedures. The Commission had to run according to the rules. The United States had been objecting and been ignored. It was not a legitimate procedure. The meeting was then suspended, to reconvene at a date to be announced. ANNEX Vote on Palestinian Women The draft resolution on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (document E/CN.6/2003/L.1) was approved by a recorded vote of 38 in favour to 1 against, with no abstentions, as follows:

In favour: Argentina, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, China, Croatia, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Gabon, Germany, Guatemala, Guinea, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Malawi, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United Republic of Tanzania. Against: United States. Abstain: None. Absent: Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Peru, _____ Against: America _____ Absent: Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Peru.