



General Assembly

Seventy-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
28 January 2020

Original: English

Third Committee

Summary record of the 7th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 4 October 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Braun (Luxembourg)

Contents

Agenda item 26: Advancement of women

- (a) Advancement of women
- (b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be sent as soon as possible, under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, to the Chief of the Documents Management Section (dms@un.org), and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>)

19-17119 (E)



Please recycle



The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 26: Advancement of women

(a) Advancement of women ([A/74/38](#), [A/74/137](#), [A/74/224](#) and [A/74/235](#))

(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly ([A/74/220](#) and [A/74/222](#))

1. **Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)) said that gender equality and women's empowerment were central to resolving the world's most pressing issues, which included climate change, the Sustainable Development Goals and financing for development. Pervasive poverty and rising inequality were of significant concern, as were the worrying trends of shrinking democratic and civic space. Violence against women and girls and renewed pushback against women's rights and gender equality were widespread.

2. As UN-Women prepared for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2020, it would be seeking renewed political will to deliver on the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women, and those set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Given the scale of the challenges, it was more important than ever to make progress on eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against all women and girls, everywhere; to champion women's and girls' voices, agency, participation and leadership; and to invest in gender equality and the women's movement.

3. Preparations for the 25-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were well under way. As at the end of September 2019, 158 national reports had been received and she encouraged all States still finalizing their reports to do so as soon as possible. The five regional commissions were leading regional review processes that would culminate in intergovernmental meetings in late October and November 2019. Those meetings would be preceded by regional civil society and multi-stakeholder consultations, as well as by several youth meetings. UN-Women was pleased to see young people participating actively in the process.

4. UN-Women had supported the preparation process in many countries, and was working closely with the

regional commissions on their forthcoming regional reviews. The Entity was collaborating with the United Nations system on an assessment of the system's support for the implementation of the Beijing Platform and the 2030 Agenda over the past five years. Preparations for the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women were also accelerating. She wished to congratulate the General Assembly on having finalized the modalities for its high-level meeting on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held on 23 September 2020.

5. In order to fully leverage the opportunity presented by the 25-year review, UN-Women was convening the multi-stakeholder Generation Equality Forum, to be co-chaired by France and Mexico, with the leadership and partnership of civil society. The Forum would start in Mexico in May 2020 and culminate in Paris in July 2020, and would ignite urgent action and accountability for gender equality. It would celebrate the power of activism, feminist solidarity and youth leadership to achieve transformative change. The outcome of the Forum would be a set of action coalitions, which were innovative partnerships among civil society, Member States, business, the United Nations system and other stakeholders. They would draw on the outcomes of the 25-year review and identify immediate actions around specific thematic areas, with timelines, funding and measurable results for the period 2020–2025. The confluence of anniversaries in 2020 should provide additional momentum for strong gender equality outcomes at the present session of the General Assembly.

6. The report of the Secretary-General on measures taken and progress achieved in follow-up to and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly ([A/74/222](#)) showed that 72 per cent of reports of the Secretary-General submitted to the Assembly at its seventy-third session included a gender perspective, which was a new high. Significant opportunities existed for more systematic integration of gender perspectives across the full spectrum of work of intergovernmental bodies. In particular, the proportion of General Assembly resolutions inclusive of a gender perspective remained below 50 per cent. She called on the General Assembly to intensify its efforts to include gender-responsive recommendations in all its resolutions.

7. The report of the Secretary-General on improvement in the status of women in the United Nations system ([A/74/220](#)) presented a picture of slow progress, but also demonstrated that significant gains were possible. The overall representation of women in

the Professional and higher categories in the United Nations system had increased from 42.8 per cent in 2015 to 44.2 per cent in 2017. While there was a continued negative correlation between the representation of women and seniority, the recent gains made at the level of Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General were starting to change that trend. There were ongoing challenges at senior management levels such as P-5, D-1 and D-2. The representation of women in the field, particularly in peace operations, also remained a major challenge. A survey of gender focal points had revealed that the main impediments to parity included inadequate career development for mid-level staff, a lack of accountability for hiring decisions, issues related to organizational culture and a lack of special measures. To improve the status of women in the United Nations system in a sustainable way, the organizational culture must be transformed to one that embraced equality, eradicated bias and was inclusive of all staff. The report highlighted good practices, policies and initiatives, such as flexible working arrangements and action to address sexual harassment.

8. The report of the Secretary-General on violence against women migrant workers (A/74/235) identified the potential for migration to promote the agency and economic empowerment of women. However, it also confirmed that the lack of safe and regular migration pathways and restrictive migration and labour laws could heighten the risk of violence and exploitation for women migrant workers, particularly women with an irregular migration status. The report covered the range of measures States had taken to prevent and combat violence and discrimination against women migrant workers.

9. The report of the Secretary-General on improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas (A/74/224) built on the critical work of the Commission on the Status of Women from March 2018. It emphasized the significant impacts of climate change on the lives of women and girls living in rural areas and on their communities, impacts that were intensified by prevailing gender inequalities. Gender equality considerations had been integrated into sustainable development and climate change frameworks, including gender-responsive agricultural and rural development policies and programmes. Efforts had been made to build the resilience and adaptive capacities of rural women and girls to respond to the adverse effects of climate change and to supply rural communities with the necessary infrastructure and technology to alleviate the burden of unpaid care and domestic work performed by women and girls that was exacerbated by climate change. The report drew attention to the significant gaps

in the availability of gender-responsive climate finance and of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics on rural women and girls and climate resilience.

10. Poor women and girls everywhere faced the double bind of income poverty and time poverty, which posed a challenge to sustainable development and required the urgent attention of policymakers. That issue had been examined in the World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (A/74/111), which would be presented to the Second Committee later in October.

11. Lastly, the *UN-Women report Progress of the World's Women 2019–2020: Families in a Changing World* had been launched in June 2019. Families, economies and societies were interdependent: each needed the other to flourish and public policy had a critical role to play in making that happen. Ensuring that families were a space for equality and justice was good for economies and societies and offered the potential to unlock progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

12. The recent Sustainable Development Goals Summit had celebrated gains but had also focused on the tremendous work ahead for Governments and stakeholders to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda by 2030. Achieving gender equality was essential if those commitments were to be met. The leadership and action of Member States were needed more than ever before.

13. **Ms. Suzuki** (Japan) said that Japan was committed to celebrating the anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and to working with UN-Women to tackle the ongoing challenges to gender equality and women's empowerment. Japan welcomed the timely launch of the UN-Women campaign "Generation Equality: Realizing women's rights for an equal future". She wondered what the key factor would be for bringing together the gender equality advocates who had been instrumental in shaping the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the next generation of women's rights activists.

14. **Ms. Sánchez García** (Colombia), referring to the report on improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas (A/74/224), said that women's access to natural resources was important, since women were disproportionately affected by climate change. Her delegation welcomed the reference in the report to the integration of a gender perspective in climate change management actions in Colombia, which were being led by the environment minister with support from the United Nations Development Programme. The inclusion of a gender perspective made it possible to give greater visibility to the differing effects of climate change on

men and women and take advantage of different experiences in mitigating it.

15. **Ms. Shikongo** (Namibia) said that inclusivity spelt harmony, and the world could not afford to exclude half of its population in its pursuit of prosperity. For that reason, Namibia had made the achievement of gender parity at the highest levels of governance and leadership a priority. Namibia had submitted its report for the 25-year review and looked forward to the commemoration events. Namibia also looked forward to working with UN-Women on preparations for the twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in 2020 and was planning to launch an international women's peace centre.

16. **Mr. Molina Linares** (Guatemala) said that his delegation was concerned by the different kinds of discrimination that women around the world continued to suffer. Owing to a lack of opportunities, women were more vulnerable to trafficking, sexual exploitation and sexual harassment in the workplace. Furthermore, discrimination against women based on stigmatization and gender stereotypes had a negative impact on their access to justice. Guatemala was grateful for the support of UN-Women and hoped to continue that fruitful cooperation.

17. **Ms. Farnago** (Liberia) said that her country lacked the capacity needed to mainstream gender throughout its systems. Liberia was facing significant challenges at both the programme and technical levels, and would request UN-Women to provide additional assistance for embedding technical experts in ministries and systems.

18. **Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)) said that bringing together the new generation of gender equality activists and the veterans from the 1995 conference in Beijing would be a key aspect of the commemoration of the anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 2020. For that reason, UN-Women was working with civil society to emphasize the importance of young people's participation and presence in the Generation Equality Forum, where there would be a possibility of intergenerational collaboration. UN-Women was also urging Member States to include a generous representation of young people in their delegations to the Commission on the Status of Women in 2020, which would be a unique forum, since the participants would be conducting an in-depth review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. At those events, young people who had not been present in

Beijing would have the opportunity to meet women who had been working on gender equality and the empowerment of women for the past 25 years. Such meetings could prove to be both inspirational and transformational, and the experiences shared could provide young people with the insights needed to become changemakers at home in their own right. Many young people and girls in Asia, Africa and Latin America were already changemakers; they simply needed encouragement and recognition. In 1995, a generation of activists had appeared that had driven the pursuit of gender equality for the past 25 years, and a new generation of activists would now complete that work.

19. Regarding the request from Liberia, country-level coordination was a crucial aspect of the United Nations reforms. The United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women must be implemented at both the headquarters and country level and UN-Women would do its best to meet the request.

20. **Ms. Gbedemah** (Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) said that the year 2019 marked the fortieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which had been a driving force behind transformative change in almost every society. However, there was a long way to go before substantive equality between women and men was achieved in all spheres of life. In addition, the number of reservations to the Convention remained high. It was therefore heartening that 93 States had signed a joint statement during the forty-first session of the Human Rights Council in which they had resolved to work towards universal ratification and the complete withdrawal of all substantive reservations that had been made to the Convention, in particular to its articles 2 and 16, in order to ensure the elimination of all forms of discrimination, including in the sphere of work, home and family.

21. The year 2019 also marked the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. During the past year, the Committee had adopted final decisions on 11 individual communications, finding violations of the Convention in four cases. It had also conducted two confidential inquiry visits into alleged grave or systematic violations by States parties and made public the report of another inquiry on abduction of girls and women for early or forced marriage.

22. The Committee had continued to promote the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in different ways.

It had continued to encourage States parties to report on measures taken to achieve the relevant targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. Under the State reporting procedure, the Committee had been able to obtain information on the progress made by States parties towards achieving the Goals through their written replies to the lists of issues or lists of issues prior to reporting that the pre-session working group adopted in preparation for the consideration of State party reports. Moreover, the Committee consistently raised questions relevant to the Goals during its constructive dialogues with States parties. Most of the 23 concluding observations that the Committee had adopted since October 2018 were linked to specific Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

23. The Committee had further strengthened its institutional collaboration to promote the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal targets. To commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Convention, the Committee, with support from UN-Women and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, had hosted a side event in New York during the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women entitled “40 Years of Empowering Women with a View of Sustainable Development”.

24. In relation to Sustainable Development Goal 5, target 5.2, the Committee had continued to work on a general recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration. In December 2018, it had held an expert group meeting with support from UN-Women, and in January 2019, three Committee members had participated in a regional consultation organized by International Women’s Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific in Bangkok. During its seventy-second session in February 2019, the Committee had held a general discussion on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration. Since February, several partner organizations had held expert group meetings in London, Athens and Helsinki in which Committee experts had participated. In November 2019, the Committee would publish the first draft of the general recommendation online and would invite comments from States parties and other stakeholders. It was also planning to hold further consultations at the regional level.

25. The Committee had strengthened its partnerships with other human rights mechanisms. In November 2018, it had endorsed a framework of cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences and had invited her to brief the Committee on her mandate and work and on her thematic report to the Human Rights Council on the 25

years of her mandate. Thanks to the framework of cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, signed in July 2018, the Committee had been able to exchange valuable information for its consideration of the exceptional report of Myanmar concerning the situation of Muslim women and girls in northern Rakhine State.

26. Together with other treaty bodies, the Committee had issued a joint statement on the issue of human rights and climate change as a contribution to the 2019 Climate Action Summit convened by the Secretary-General. The statement addressed the duty of all States to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, thereby highlighting Sustainable Development Goal 13, and it referred to general recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change.

27. The Committee continued to implement the measures set forth in General Assembly resolution [68/268](#) on strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system. It had designated four of its members as focal points for the 2020 treaty body review process. In relation to the simplified reporting procedure, the Committee had continuously reviewed its working methods to ensure alignment with other treaty bodies and greater efficiency. In February 2019, the Committee had delegated authority to its pre-session working group to adopt lists of issues prior to reporting. In July 2019, the Committee had removed the requirement of the submission of a common core document for States parties wishing to avail themselves of the simplified reporting procedure. To date, the Committee had received requests from more than 40 States parties to report under the simplified reporting procedure, seven of which had been reviewed under that procedure.

28. In line with General Assembly resolution [68/268](#), the Committee had adopted a decision in July 2019 to enhance the accessibility of its documentation for experts and stakeholders with disabilities. General Assembly resolution [68/268](#) also strongly condemned all acts of intimidation and reprisals against individuals and groups for their contribution to the work of the human rights treaty bodies. To implement the Guidelines against Intimidation or Reprisal (“San José Guidelines”) ([HRI/MC/2015/6](#)), the Committee had appointed a rapporteur and alternate rapporteur on reprisals, who had successfully intervened in one reprisal case during the reporting period. In another case, information on individuals facing reprisals had been transmitted to the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the

situation of human rights defenders for their consideration.

29. Also pursuant to General Assembly resolution [68/268](#), the Committee had continued to operate in country task forces in examining periodic State reports; formulate shorter and more focused, concrete and country-specific concluding observations; and increase the use of videoconferencing for consultations with United Nations country teams and for remote participation of delegation members in constructive dialogues.

30. In June 2019, she had chaired the thirty-first meeting of Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies in the context of the review of the treaty body system to take place in April 2020. The Chairs had met with the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General, and representatives of Member States, United Nations agencies and civil society. The discussions had centred on the 2020 treaty body review and a vision had been agreed upon for the future of the system. It included a plan to extend the use of the simplified reporting procedure, combined with a predictable schedule of reviews and greater coordination and discipline to reduce unnecessary duplication. The vision also included the possibility of increasing the capacity of treaty bodies to review States by working in chambers, working groups or country teams. Moreover, the Chairs believed there to be considerable benefit in conducting dialogues with States at the regional level through smaller teams of Committee experts. Ultimately, that would depend on the provision of adequate resources and support by Member States.

31. On 30 April 2019, the Committee had been informed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights that a decision by the General Assembly to apply a 25 per cent cut across the budget for the travel of high-level experts would mean postponing the holding of sessions for committees with a third session. Thanks to the mobilization of Chairs and other stakeholders and the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner, a stop-gap solution had been found so that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, as well as the other five committees with third sessions, could hold their third sessions as planned at the end of the year.

32. The consequences of postponing the sessions would have been dire for the 32 States parties scheduled to be reviewed by the committees. Apart from the cost of postponement and the inconvenience to delegations and participating stakeholders, the delay would have posed a serious threat to the credibility of the human rights treaty bodies, which was an unparalleled

protection mechanism that States had progressively developed over a period of 54 years. Furthermore, the committees would have had to postpone the consideration of 68 individual complaints, many of which contained serious allegations of human rights violations. Justice delayed was justice denied, and the Committee strongly hoped that the issue could be addressed during the treaty body review, so that sustainable solutions could be put in place to ensure that committee sessions and country visits by the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment could proceed as planned.

33. As the treaty body review approached, the Committee understood that the financial situation remained challenging. The Secretary-General had informed the Committee of the difficult financial situation facing the United Nations in terms of its cash flow and its ability to fully finance mandated activities from the regular budget. The Committee asked Member States to fulfil their responsibilities arising from the human rights treaties that they had ratified.

34. The Committee's work had continued to expand in 2018–2019, and while the outcome of the treaty body strengthening process had provided welcome new resources, staffing support had not kept pace with the growth in the work, particularly for individual communications and inquiry procedures. She remained hopeful that the 2020 treaty body review process would address the resource problem so that the Committee could continue to meet the expectations placed on it by women around the world.

35. **The Chair** assured the Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women that her comments would be given full consideration by the Bureau and by members of the Third Committee.

36. **Mr. Bourtembourg** (Observer for the European Union) said that the European Union fully supported the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. His delegation urged States parties to withdraw any reservations that were contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention and urged all States that had not yet done so to accede to the Convention and the Optional Protocol.

37. The European Union recognized civil society's valuable contribution to strengthening the international human rights system and noted the Committee's decision to consider innovative ways and means to promote the engagement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in relation to their submission of reports on broader issues under the Convention. He

asked how the Committee was seeking to ensure that NGOs and women human rights defenders could continue to engage with the Committee effectively.

38. The European Union commended the Committee on the cooperative work that it continued to undertake, including the statements that it had issued in conjunction with other human rights experts and treaty bodies. He would be interested in hearing more about the draft general recommendation on the important topic of trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration.

39. **Ms. Calaminus** (Germany) said that, at the same time as the fortieth anniversary of its adoption was being celebrated, the Convention was coming under attack, including from States that had made women's empowerment a core principle. In light of those worrying developments, Germany wished to reaffirm its commitment to promoting full gender equality and eradicating barriers. The empowerment of women could not be achieved unless women could exercise all of their rights, including sexual and reproductive rights.

40. Germany noted that there was still widespread discrimination and stigma surrounding menstruation and menstrual hygiene. Women and girls often lacked basic information, and they were excluded from school, university and the workplace, preventing them from realizing their full potential. She asked how the Committee was addressing the issue of menstrual health in its work.

41. **Ms. Suzuki** (Japan) said that Japan had been pursuing domestic and international initiatives to foster gender equality and the empowerment of women in line with its commitment to build a society in which women could shine. Human rights treaty bodies were forums for verifying the implementation of legal obligations under each treaty. She asked whether the Chair could share information on the challenges faced by the Committee and the measures that should be taken to implement its mandate constructively and effectively.

42. **Ms. Farngalo** (Liberia) said that, given the intersectionality of discrimination, Liberia applauded the effort to foster collaboration with other treaty bodies. She confirmed that Liberia would fulfil its follow-up reporting obligations.

43. **Ms. Khusanova** (Russian Federation) said that, to be able to work effectively, there must be equal and mutually effective dialogue with States. Her delegation could not accept any attempts to impose new unilateral commitments and called on the Committee to comply with the Convention and adhere to the framework of General Assembly resolution [68/268](#). According to

paragraph 9 of that resolution, the activities of treaty bodies should fall under the provisions of the respective treaties, and thus not create new obligations for States parties. The Committee was continuing its flawed practice of using general comments to engage in a broad interpretation of States' obligations under the Convention. A further example of the arbitrary interpretation of its mandate was the so-called follow-up procedure for evaluating States' implementation of its recommendations, which was not stipulated by the Convention. Her delegation called on the Committee to eliminate such arbitrary practices, including the delay in the consideration of national reports. Unfortunately, the time lag between the submission of a report and its presentation before the Committee was more than a year. There was potential for continuing dialogue with the Committee on improving its working methods. She asked the Chair to explain how the Committee might renew that dialogue and follow through on the assurances given earlier.

44. **Ms. Gunnufsen** (Norway) said that the work of the treaty bodies was the cornerstone of the international system for monitoring States' compliance with their human rights obligations. Countries' efforts to implement the treaties must be scrutinized by independent bodies with the requisite expertise. At the same time, the reporting burden must not be too onerous. Norway was pleased that its next periodic report to the Committee would be submitted according to the simplified reporting procedure. Treaty bodies for which the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was the coordinating instance should implement the simplified reporting procedure as soon as possible. All treaty bodies should have the same procedure and it should be accessible, simplified and comprehensible.

45. Paragraph 38 of resolution [68/268](#) encouraged the treaty bodies to continue to enhance the role of their Chairs in relation to procedural matters, including with respect to formulating conclusions on issues related to working methods and procedural matters. She asked what measures had been adopted by the Committee and by the system as a whole in response to paragraph 38 and what work had been undertaken across the committees to harmonize treaty body working methods.

46. **Mr. Holtz** (United Kingdom) said that the effective and equal participation of women in public and economic life was an essential element of good governance and effective democracy; the fact that so many of the Committee's recent general comments had focused on implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals demonstrated that the Committee

agreed that gender equality was vital to achieving so many other international goals.

47. The United Kingdom was committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Convention. His country welcomed the ongoing discussion with the Committee regarding its progress and the Committee's recognition of the country's strong legislation, its strategies to advance the equality of women and girls and its efforts to promote and protect their rights.

48. Across a number of multilateral forums, including in the Third Committee, there had been a concerted effort to roll back women's hard-won rights. He asked how the Committee was combating that issue and how Member States could better engage with the Committee to reaffirm their commitment to the Convention at a critical time.

49. **Ms. Gbedemah** (Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) said that the Committee engaged with civil society organizations and assured them of the value of their input and used technology to ensure open and transparent modes of engagement. With regard to human rights defenders, the Committee ensured that they knew that they should not be penalized for their work and that the United Nations system was committed to their protection.

50. Concerning the draft general recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration, the Committee had engaged extensively with the regions and listened to their feedback, and continued to do so to strengthen the content, scope and impact of the recommendation.

51. Menstrual shaming had the greatest impact at the lower educational levels, but the effect was also apparent at the university level. In its general recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education, the Committee had recommended that menstruation should not impede women's right to education and that teachers and schools should provide a supportive environment for girls. The Committee addressed the issue in a country-specific manner.

52. The main challenges faced by the Committee were resource-related. Committee members were overburdened, and the secretariat was under pressure. There had also been some pushback regarding women's rights; the Committee was therefore engaging constructively with the State parties concerned and on the specific issues. Through a constructive dialogue, the importance of upholding those rights was shared and the Committee provided information on best practices around the world. It also emphasized that until all women's rights covered by the Convention were

respected, development would be hampered, since the Convention concerned both human rights and development. States parties were sometimes willing to look at the issues from various perspectives, ultimately recognizing that it was a question of maximizing a country's human resources for development.

53. The follow-up system ensured that, after the constructive dialogue, feedback could be provided in two years rather than four, which accelerated the fulfilment of women's rights. It was a valuable process and one that was increasingly appreciated by States parties. Additionally, follow-up reports often provided an insight into current trends.

54. Regarding the remarks made by the Russian Federation, she noted that women's rights had evolved since the adoption of the Convention 40 years previously. Some new forms of violence had become pervasive, such as cyberbullying, while climate change had become a priority issue. The general comments guided States parties in fulfilling their obligations, and also served to guide Committee members in their engagement with States parties. As a Convention on both human rights and development, it needed to remain in step with international developments. Rural women and women and migration were matters that were not fully articulated in the Convention, and having guidance to follow was preferable to dealing with them on an ad hoc basis.

55. The treaty bodies had met several times over the past few years with a view to streamlining their procedures and alleviating the reporting burden. Predictability and uniformity made compliance easier for stakeholders. The treaty bodies had discussed the simplified reporting procedure and the format of the concluding observations and had worked together to ensure that there was no duplication. They were now looking at reporting cycles and the timing of reviews. It was a work in progress and was constantly under review.

56. The Committee had engaged in constant constructive dialogue with the States parties regarding the rollback of women's rights and had ensured that reprisals would be dealt with and that women human rights defenders had a safe space in which to operate. The Committee constantly held up best practices and helped States parties to realize the importance of the human rights regime and the Convention in particular. Given the varied backgrounds of the Committee members, there were always members whose approach resonated with a particular State.

57. She was grateful for the robustness of States' engagement and their encouraging comments, and was committed to working with each and every one of them.

Without effective mobilization of the female population and without removing the discrimination that held them back, it would be very difficult to realize the vision set out in the Sustainable Development Goals.

58. **Ms. Šimonović** (Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences) said that, in the thematic report she had presented to the Human Rights Council in June 2019 (A/HRC/41/42), she had analysed 25 years of the mandate, the current challenges and the way forward. She had also presented two country visit reports on Canada (A/HRC/41/42/Add.1) and Nepal (A/HRC/41/42/Add.2). In October and November 2019, she would undertake official country visits to Bulgaria and Ecuador.

59. In order to eliminate violence against women and girls, a new system-wide global approach was needed. The Platform of independent international and regional mechanisms on violence against women and women's rights, which she had initiated in 2017 and continued to lead, would contribute to that approach. The Platform was intended to enhance cooperation between seven international and regional independent mechanisms, with a view to harmonizing strategies and undertaking joint action to protect women's human rights and eliminate violence against women. It could also speak with one voice on topics of joint concern. The Platform had been convened on two occasions since October 2018 and had issued a number of joint statements over the past year.

60. Her thematic report to the General Assembly (A/74/137) concerned the adoption of a human rights-based approach to mistreatment and violence against women in reproductive health services, with a focus on childbirth and obstetric violence. In response to growing concerns, the World Health Organization had issued a statement in 2015 on the prevention and elimination of disrespect and abuse during facility-based childbirth. Since then, new social movements had arisen in several countries demanding rights for women in reproductive health services and during childbirth. It was evident that mistreatment and violence against women during childbirth were widespread and engrained in health systems all over the world. The high number of submissions she had received in response to her call for input showed that there was a need to discuss the issue and for States to take action.

61. Violence against women during childbirth was part of a continuum of gender-based violence and was also the result of other factors, such as a lack of respect for women's dignity, equal status and human rights. In her report, she had also addressed the root causes of such mistreatment and violence, which included failing

health systems, harmful gender stereotypes and the doctrine of medical necessity. She had drawn attention to the fact that such acts should be considered human rights violations.

62. She had recommended that States uphold their human rights obligations, develop appropriate human rights-based laws and conduct an independent investigation into women's allegations of mistreatment and gender-based violence in health-care facilities and publish the results and recommendations. Under international law, States could not escape their responsibility to address violations committed by health institutions. States should establish human rights-based accountability mechanisms to ensure redress for victims.

63. Coincidentally, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe had the previous day adopted a resolution on the basis of the report of Ms. Maryvonne Blondin on obstetrical and gynaecological violence, which was further evidence of the growing need to recognize, address and eradicate such violence.

64. Turning to her long-term initiative to combat femicide, she said that she, along with other members of the Platform, would be issuing a call on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November 2019 for States to submit data on the number of femicides and on the mechanisms established to prevent them. She hoped to receive twice as many responses as the previous year and that the submissions would show that the initiative was proving effective.

65. In her report to the Human Rights Council, she had highlighted the current disconnect between her mandate and that of the United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women and had called for cooperation between the mandate holder and the trust fund, as envisaged in General Assembly resolution 50/166. Similarly, she reiterated her call for full cooperation between the mandate holder and relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 41/17, and sought the support of Member States in that regard.

66. In the run-up to the 25-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, it was important to intensify the progress made in placing violence against women on the international agenda as a violation of women's human rights and a form of gender-based discrimination. Indeed, it should become a priority issue that was addressed each year by the Commission on the Status of Women, as she had suggested at the Commission's most recent session. The Platform must be fully integrated

into the 25-year review process, and a publication was being prepared on the role of each independent mechanism participating in the Platform.

67. **Mr. García Moritán** (Argentina) said that Argentina was committed to cooperating with the mandate holder. His country supported the call to establish national and international observatories to prevent femicide, as they would give greater visibility to the issue and the data could be used to develop effective strategies.

68. Regarding the Special Rapporteur's thematic report to the General Assembly, Argentina agreed that States should adopt a human rights-based approach to the problem of mistreatment and violence against women in reproductive health services. The country had taken action to counter obstetric violence through a law on humanitarian birth, which promoted and protected the rights of women and babies during the entire birth process.

69. In view of the approaching anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, he asked the Special Rapporteur how her mandate could help States improve their fulfilment of the commitments undertaken in those international instruments, especially with regard to violence against women.

70. **Ms. Fréchin** (Switzerland) said that her country welcomed the human rights-based approach to the mistreatment of and violence against women in reproductive health services. Switzerland also congratulated the Special Rapporteur on her ongoing efforts to forge closer institutional cooperation. However, her delegation was very concerned by the lack of an international consensus regarding the definition and measurement of violence against women during birth and by the normalization and extent of such acts. It was also concerned by the lack of statistics on the subject, including in Switzerland. She asked whether the Special Rapporteur could provide any examples of best practices in data collection that had made it possible to give the issue greater prominence on the political agenda.

71. **Mr. de Souza Monteiro** (Brazil) said that the universal right to health was enshrined in his country's Constitution. All Brazilians and foreign residents had access to free health care and medication. According to its report, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had decided to close the follow-up dialogue relating to the case *Alyne da Silva Pimentel Teixeira v. Brazil*, finding that its recommendations had been satisfactorily implemented. The case, unacceptable as it was, had contributed to the

advancement of important and necessary measures to prevent maternal morbidity and mortality in Brazil. The country had sent timely reports to the Committee, provided financial reparation to the victim's mother, and invested in health infrastructure and training for health-care workers. It had enacted laws and developed programmes that provided for the humanization of care for women and their newborns, and promoted quality obstetric and neonatal care. Brazil remained committed to addressing the health needs of all women and girls and to continuing to develop internal measures to combat obstetric violence.

72. **Ms. Ní Chonchúir** (Ireland) said that the issues highlighted by the report had been the subject of profound and far-reaching conversation in Ireland and that taboos were being lifted. There had been a sustained focus on improving maternity services in recent years. The 2016 national maternity strategy envisioned a service that placed women and families at the centre and treated them with dignity, respect and compassion. Support for a woman's choice was an expression of respect for a person's autonomy and right to bodily integrity. It was a fundamental ethical requirement that must be underpinned by the principle of informed consent and must be obtained in advance of any medical procedure.

73. Following recent constitutional and legislative changes in Ireland, termination of pregnancy had been permitted since January 2019 under specific circumstances. Ireland had also put in place measures for women affected by episiotomy. In particular, a voluntary non-adversarial person-centred payment scheme had been set up to bring closure for the majority of women, so that they would not face an uncertain outcome in the courts. Almost 400 women had benefited under the scheme, and the State had also provided an appropriate investigation mechanism.

74. **Ms. Vasquez Muñoz** (Mexico) said that the information in the report was alarming and urgent action must be taken. Violence was a scourge that affected all States, but obstetric violence in particular remained a taboo subject while continuing to threaten women's lives, health and bodily integrity. A related subject was pregnancy among adolescents and girls resulting from sexual violence. Mexico urged the Special Rapporteur to participate in the Nairobi Summit marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development, as a process leading up to the 25-year review. Disaggregated data were crucial, as they would reveal the impact of intersectional discrimination on obstetric violence. She asked whether the Special Rapporteur was still considering collaborating with the Committee of Experts of the

Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention and was interested to hear what her future plans were.

75. **Ms. Oehri** (Liechtenstein) said that her delegation was pleased to hear that the Special Rapporteur considered the trafficking of women and girls to be a form of violence and had recommended country-specific measures. It also welcomed the focus of the new draft general recommendation. Actors other than Governments, including the private sector, needed to be involved in the prevention and elimination of human trafficking, which was an extremely lucrative illegal business model. That was also reflected in the work of the Liechtenstein initiative and in the Blueprint for Mobilizing Financing Against Slavery and Trafficking, which had been launched during the high-level week. She asked to what extent the Special Rapporteur had been working with actors other than Governments to prevent and eliminate trafficking in women and girls and what role private sector actors could potentially play in combating the trafficking of migrant women and girls.

76. **Ms. Cue Delgado** (Cuba) said that, while agreeing with many of the Special Rapporteur's conclusions and recommendations, her delegation would have appreciated a more detailed analysis of the impact of differing levels of development on reproductive health services, and especially the impact of poverty and extreme poverty. In Cuba, only licensed professionals were permitted to carry out medical procedures. Sexual and reproductive rights, including the right to abortion, were protected and formed part of women's and family health services, along with family planning, and information and education services.

77. **Mr. Bourtembourg** (Observer for the European Union) said that the report had shown that the mistreatment and violence women experienced during childbirth and in other reproductive health services was widespread and systematic. All women and girls had the right to dignified and respectful sexual and reproductive health care and services. More cooperation was needed between health institutions, NGOs, women's movements and all relevant United Nations actors. The European Union also agreed with the need for improved follow-up of the reports and recommendations issued within the purview of the Special Rapporteur's mandate and stood ready to assist the Special Rapporteur in that regard. He wondered how the European Union could help deepen understanding of the nature of the challenges and the violations, their causes and effects, in order to be able to guide remedy and redress measures and take action against all forms of violence against women and girls.

78. **Ms. Košir** (Slovenia) said that her country welcomed the theme of the report, which had received little attention until recently. Slovenia attached great importance to the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in all spheres of life and agreed that States had an obligation to uphold women's human rights, including the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health during childbirth and in reproductive services. Slovenia was committed to fulfilling that obligation and had passed legislation protecting the right to comprehensive preventive health care for women in respect of reproductive health, pregnancy and childbirth.

79. In many countries, mistreatment and gender-based violence in reproductive services and childbirth still occurred despite legislation and policies to prevent them. She asked whether the Special Rapporteur could provide information on best practices for effectively addressing mistreatment or violence in reproductive services and childbirth.

80. **Ms. Diedricks** (South Africa) said that South Africa was taking urgent steps to tackle gender-based violence, including through recent commitments to removing the obstacles to women and girls' enjoyment of quality and accessible health-care services, including reproductive health services. In that regard, and while welcoming the recommendations, South Africa would appreciate further insights on the elaboration of specific national strategies on reproductive health services and childbirth and their relationship with broader national health strategies and policies.

81. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) said that her delegation firmly condemned all forms of violence and against women and girls and reiterated its commitment to combat it in all spheres. A comprehensive approach to finding solutions was needed, with enhanced participation from men and boys. She asked how more men and boys could be mobilized as stakeholders and strategic partners in the prevention of violence against women, in particular in the area of health-care services and obstetric violence. She also wondered whether the Special Rapporteur could share good practices for improving data collection and overcoming some of the taboos associated with violence against women and girls in the health-care field. Lastly, she asked what role religious leaders and the local community could play.

82. **Ms. Buist-Catherwood** (New Zealand) said that, while violence against women was not a niche, isolated or new issue, new challenges and regressive trends were emerging. States must do more to protect women's rights, including by providing health care. Women and girls must have power over their own bodies and lives,

including the right to have full control over matters relating to their sexual and reproductive rights and health without fear of mistreatment or violence. New Zealand also shared the concerns regarding discrimination against women and girls with disabilities. Women and girls must be empowered through inclusive programmes on the prevention of and protection against gender-based violence and through education and awareness-raising. While a legal framework was critical to protection and accountability, social norms also needed to change. She asked what represented the biggest challenge in tackling structural barriers that undermined sexual and reproductive health and rights.

83. **Ms. Al Kuwari** (Qatar) said that her country had always upheld and protected the rights of women by respecting the conventions that were designed to protect them. Qatar had been a party to those instruments for many years and had adopted various policies to combat violence and discrimination against women. Qatar respected women's rights during childbirth and had taken steps to protect those rights, improve the health status of its citizens and provide services in line with demographic trends. Significant achievements had been made in terms of women's health and women received full care during pregnancy and birth.

84. **Mr. Holtz** (United Kingdom) said that violence had a significant and lasting impact on the achievement of gender equality worldwide. Its continued prevalence, including in the form of intimate partner violence, made it one of the most systemic and widespread human rights violations. That was especially true in times of conflict.

85. The international community must address the underlying drivers of gender inequality and discriminatory social norms, which were not only damaging to individuals but also to society as a whole. Sharing lessons learned and best practices was vital in order to end violence against women and girls, support survivors and bring perpetrators to justice. However, violence against women was preventable. A ground-breaking programme set up by his country's Department for International Development had shown that, when systemically addressed through evidence-based interventions, violence against women and girls could be reduced by up to half in a matter of years. The United Kingdom encouraged other States to make use of such interventions. He asked the Special Rapporteur how she engaged with such programmes and whether they were useful for her work, and how she engaged with domestic and international gender equality initiatives, so that they could be adjusted to support her work.

86. **Ms. Brink** (Australia) said that her country welcomed the report's human rights-based approach and supported its conclusions and recommendations. Given that the theme had been described as taboo, the extensive participation of Member States in the interactive dialogue was very positive. Complications arising from pregnancy and childbirth were the leading cause of death for women and for girls in particular. Australia supported the report's finding that violence, abuse and a lack of respect for women and girls and their human rights had the potential to deeply compromise physical and mental health and well-being, and that those factors contributed to mortality and morbidity. Australia concurred that women's rights included the right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health; freedom from mistreatment and violence; the right to dignified, humane and respectful reproductive health services and obstetric care; and the right to autonomy, privacy, confidentiality, informed consent and choice.

87. **Ms. De Man** (Netherlands) said that it was unacceptable that women faced widespread violence and discrimination during childbirth and when using reproductive health services. Crucially, the report recognized that a lack of informed consent constituted a human rights violation. Women and girls required full information about all of their options, including comprehensive sexuality education. In addition, the Netherlands strongly believed that laws requiring spousal or third-party consent for medical treatment severely restricted the ability of women and girls to make decisions about their own bodies and lives. Moreover, denying women access to safe abortion services and contraceptives constituted a form of violence against women. The Netherlands called upon all States to recognize women and girls' rights to bodily integrity and autonomy and looked to the Special Rapporteur for support in ensuring the recognition of those rights as a prerequisite for realizing women's rights to life and health free from violence and discrimination. She asked whether the Special Rapporteur could expand on the age factor with regard to the human rights violations under consideration.

88. **Mr. Bjordal** (Norway) said that violence against women and domestic violence remained one of the most serious and widespread human rights problems. It was also one of the most underreported crimes. Violence against women and domestic violence were unacceptable and punishable. It was not a private matter and should therefore be dealt with by Governments. It must be prevented, combated and alleviated through measures to assist and protect the victims and through treatment and prosecution of the perpetrators. Measures

to prevent violence were also vital for promoting gender equality, since gender-based violence reinforced and underpinned discrimination. It was vital to prevent, uncover and follow up on violence, abuse and other kinds of stress that could cause damage and could affect the welfare of the mother and child. He asked how States could ensure that violence against women was not treated as a private matter, how to reduce the stigma associated with such violence and how to encourage women to come forward to reach safety and obtain justice.

89. **Ms. Khusanova** (Russian Federation) said that her delegation could not agree with the report's recommendations regarding "home birth" issues. It was the State that should play the leading role in protecting reproductive health. The key to maintaining women's health was close, timely organization of the medical processes, high-quality medical assistance and qualified personnel. She asked which particular subgroups of persons needed to be protected from intersectional discrimination and compounded stereotypes, as mentioned in subparagraph 81(t) of the report.

90. **Ms. Korac** (United States of America) said that forced abortion and forced sterilization were abhorrent and the United States condemned those abusive practices. However, her delegation had some concern regarding the report's recommendation that States should not criminalize home births. While the United States was not suggesting that home birth should be criminalized, it was apprehensive about the practice. If complications arose during a home birth and trained medical personnel, equipment or supplies were not available, the health and safety of the mother and baby could be at risk. The United States would continue to give priority to efforts to provide safe delivery and respectful care for all women. She asked what more Member States and the international community could do to ensure access to care for women and girls with disabilities on an equal basis with other women and girls.

91. **Mr. Leuprecht** (Canada) said that his delegation was deeply concerned by the report's accounts of human rights violations, mistreatment and widespread violence against women and girls in reproductive health services and during childbirth. Violence in all its forms and at all stages of the maternal health cycle was unacceptable, and Canada welcomed the report's focus on childbirth and obstetric violence. The report provided an opportunity to examine investments in global health, national health systems and service providers and consider access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health services and information for reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health.

Canada would continue to work closely with all stakeholders on a comprehensive approach to sexual and reproductive health services, which was critical to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and adolescent girls. He wondered whether the Special Rapporteur could elaborate on the intersectional discrimination and compounded stereotypes that she had mentioned in her report and how they were connected to discriminatory laws and harmful gender stereotypes.

92. **Ms. Šimonović** (Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences) said that the discussion had shown that States were interested in examining the topic further from a human rights perspective and that her recommendations were a valuable tool for breaking the taboo and upholding women's rights in reproductive health services and childbirth.

93. She was working closely with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and other independent mechanisms to look at the challenges that many countries were facing. In the case of reproductive rights and obstetric violence, specific legislation had already been enacted in Latin America to combat obstetric violence. However, each country had its own shortcomings, making data collection extremely important.

94. The collection of data on gender-related killings of women was bearing fruit thanks to cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Information was being extracted from the intentional homicide data on gender-related killings of women that constituted intimate partner killings or family-related killings, which were two very objective categories based purely on the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. The statistics showed that 80 per cent of the persons killed in intimate partner killings were women. The gender perspective provided by that data was enabling countries to analyse shortcomings at the national level and determine what action should be taken.

95. Concerning data on obstetric violence, new lines of cooperation were being established between human rights specialists and health specialists. To be clear, the health-care professions were not under attack; it was a matter of merging the human rights framework with developments in the area of health care with the aim of collecting data and obtaining an objective picture of mistreatment and violence against women. The situation varied between countries, but specific types of mistreatment of women during childbirth were often a taboo issue. However, good practices, where they existed, should be followed. If WHO clearly

recommended that episiotomy should be performed in up to 20 per cent of births, then the practice of performing the procedure in 70 or 80 per cent of births in certain countries should be addressed by health-care professionals and Governments.

96. Women needed to be able to file complaints. Numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had stated that women's complaints were not properly heard in many European countries. There must be greater dialogue between Governments and women's NGOs, women academics and all those dealing with respectful maternity care who had expressed concerns. Specialized NGOs were requesting closer contact with professional physicians' associations that already had good standards.

97. Regarding the suggestion that she should attend the Nairobi Summit, the Special Rapporteur would need to be invited and her participation would need to be explicitly mentioned in the resolution renewing her mandate. Her attendance at such meetings required the support of various United Nations agencies. However, there was certainly a need for closer cooperation between the many different mandate holders. As part of the 25-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, States were looking at existing international frameworks and agendas. Although her mandate had existed for only one year at the time of the Fourth World Conference on Women, it had nevertheless been mentioned in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. However, in the preparations for the 25-year review, no reference had been made to her mandate, to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or to other mechanisms. She called on States to uphold and support the role of those mechanisms in that review process, including with financial resources, since they were responsible for complying with their commitments.

98. While her initiative, the Platform of independent international and regional mechanisms on violence against women and women's rights, was currently only a project, it should be made more sustainable in the future, with support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UN-Women and other organizations.

99. In terms of follow up, she noted that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe had adopted a resolution containing concrete recommendations for States immediately following its consideration of a report on obstetric and gynaecological violence. The Third Committee, however, would not prepare a similar resolution in

response to her report. It would be necessary to find other ways to reflect her recommendations in the work of the Committee and the Human Rights Council, and in the work of other parts of the United Nations system that were able to support the special procedures.

100. Regarding home birth, she had not intended to push States in a particular direction. In the context of preventing obstetric violence, she was calling on States to consider allowing home births and to avoid criminalizing them. Such criminalization had led to the imprisonment of women. States should consider the possibility of allowing home births and whether appropriate safeguards could be put in place. The European Court of Human Rights had ruled that home birth should not be criminalized, but did not support it as a human right and considered that the matter should be decided by States. In States where home birth was an option, it could be a means of preventing obstetric violence, and should be studied on that basis.

101. Lastly, she appreciated the concern expressed by States regarding the matter of informed consent, which was truly a human rights issue. In many States, informed consent was not properly administered; in many cases it consisted of a blanket signature and in some States it was even called a waiver of consent.

102. **The Chair** invited the Committee to engage in a general discussion on the item.

103. **Ms. Rasheed** (Observer for the State of Palestine), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the mainstreaming of gender throughout development efforts and women's full and equal participation in all spheres of life were critical to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. While progress had been made in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, serious and persistent challenges and gaps remained at all levels and in every country.

104. Violence against women and girls continued to be a major obstacle to the achievement of gender-related goals. All forms of gender-based violence, and in particular femicide, must be prevented and eliminated and vulnerable groups must be protected from multiple and aggravated forms of discrimination, for which disaggregated data would be needed. Women and girls living in countries affected by armed conflict, under foreign occupation or subject to unilateral coercive measures suffered discrimination and violence and lacked access to basic health care, education and social protection, in violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

105. Persistent barriers must be removed to enable women to gain access to the resources that they needed to fully exercise their human rights, including equal access to full and productive employment and decent work. Adequate resources must be allocated for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in the workplace. That would require stronger international cooperation and intensified global dialogue to ensure that a gender perspective was incorporated into all policies and measures related to women's advancement and empowerment. North-South and South-South cooperation must be intensified in order to address the challenges faced by women and girls and enhance their role as full and equal partners in the development of their societies.

106. Lastly, the success of the high-level meeting to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held on 23 September 2020, would depend on whether Governments and other stakeholders took the necessary measures during the preparation process to achieve the common goals.

107. **Ms. Mwale** (Zambia), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union were intended to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. However, their implementation required strong political commitment, financing for gender equality and empowerment of women, and the inclusion of women and girls living in rural areas in national decision-making processes. Greater financing was needed from all sources, especially from Governments and official development assistance.

108. Africa was predominately rural and women and girls living in rural areas continued to have less access to productive resources, basic services, land, credit and leadership positions. They must be empowered through their increased retention in education at all levels and vocational training. It was essential to close the development gap between women and girls living in rural and urban areas. The Group of African States was committed to devoting resources to the development of rural areas, particularly to sustainable agriculture and fisheries and to supporting women working in those sectors.

109. The Group of African States condemned violence against women and girls in all its forms and manifestations. Migrant women and girls were particularly vulnerable to violence and to injury and permanent disability because of dangerous working environments and exploitative labour conditions. Women migrant workers who had suffered violence and

exploitation continued to face barriers in their access to justice. The Group hoped that the root causes of migration would be discussed at length during the current session; political will was needed to address the political and socioeconomic push factors.

110. The disease burden in Africa hindered rural women's progress, since caregiving responsibilities prevented them from participating in other activities. The Group reaffirmed its commitment to accelerating progress in fighting communicable and non-communicable diseases.

111. Addressing gender gaps was one of the most effective ways to build climate resilience. More partnerships and greater collaboration must be fostered, but such efforts must be sensitive to the needs of women living in rural areas. It was not enough to include them at the highest levels of decision-making, they must have the opportunity to lead. Their initiatives, indigenous knowledge and perspectives could inform and influence solutions to climate change. The Group called on its partners to assist in building infrastructure and communications networks and increase foreign direct investment and the transfer of technology on mutually agreed terms to meet the climate change adaptation and mitigation needs of Africa. Africa was the continent most vulnerable to climate change given its low capacity to adapt and respond economically, politically and geographically. The Group of African States appealed to its partners to fulfil their commitments in terms of climate financing and long-standing official development assistance. It was time for States to act collectively and intensify their efforts.

112. **Mr. Kelapile** (Botswana), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that women constituted the majority of poor people in Southern Africa. Gender equality was a fundamental human right and an integral part of regional integration, economic growth and social development. SADC was committed to eliminating all aspects of gender inequality, including economic disparities and violence against women. Its founding treaty recognized the vital importance of women in development, as did various regional legal and programmatic instruments observed by most of its members. It was committed to achieving the gender-related goals of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

113. To date, legal progress had been commendable. Members had joined instruments and frameworks that promoted women's rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Constitutions had been amended and legislative

provisions adopted to ensure equal rights for women, including access to justice, representation in political and decision-making processes and access to education, health and employment. However, the region continued to face challenges with regard to early marriage, family laws, gender-based violence, trafficking in persons, communicable and non-communicable diseases and the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. SADC viewed partnerships as an essential complement to the efforts of its members, who remained committed to ensuring the full social and economic participation of women and girls.

114. **Mr. Prongthura** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that most ASEAN countries were on track to eradicate absolute poverty by 2030. ASEAN had come a long way in terms of the promotion of gender equality and advancement of women. According to research undertaken by UN-Women, women in ASEAN countries had contributed significantly to social stability and economic growth and were an essential contributor to sustainable growth in the region. Women made up around half of graduates in many ASEAN countries and the region was working to ensure that they would enjoy equal opportunities in business, political representation and leadership.

115. The advancement of women in the region was supported by numerous ASEAN mechanisms, including the ASEAN Committee on Women Work Plan (2016–2020), the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network. In June 2019, the Network had organized a regional women's business conference in Bangkok and would host a second conference in October to enable women entrepreneurs to expand their networks and share their experiences.

116. ASEAN recognized the indispensable role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflict and in peacebuilding and peacekeeping. Women's equal, full, and effective participation beyond the economic sphere was essential to the achievement of sustainable development in the region. In August 2019, the first regional symposium on implementing the women and peace and security agenda had been organized in Phnom Penh.

117. The ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children was designed to ensure traffickers were punished and to protect and assist the victims, with full respect for their human rights. It recognized the need for more coordinated enforcement and collaborative action across the region.

118. As the global community celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 2020, ASEAN remained firmly committed to do its part to advance the spirit and promises of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.