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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men: women and girls of African descent

Interactive dialogue on the focus area: women and girls of African descent

Chair’s summary

1. On 14 March 2019, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive dialogue on the focus area on women and girls of African descent. The Vice-Chair of the Commission, Mauricio Carabalí Baquero (Colombia), made an introductory statement and chaired the dialogue. The following guest speakers made opening remarks: a member of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, Dominique Day; the General Coordinator of the Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women’s Network, Caren Paola Yañez; the Executive Coordinator of Instituto da Mulher Negra, Valdecir Nascimento; the Programme Manager of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Sami Nevala; and the Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. Ministers and high-level officials from six Member States contributed to the dialogue, as did one observer and a representative from a United Nations organization. Representatives from 10 non-governmental organizations also provided their views. The dialogue concluded with closing comments by the Vice-Chair.

Key messages

2. Participants stated that, compared with women and girls of other backgrounds, women and girls of African descent face added discrimination and disadvantage and are further behind as a result of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and historical legacies. In addition to the challenge of combating discrimination on the basis of race and gender, there is a need to eliminate resistance to efforts aimed at levelling the playing field for women and girls of African descent and to overcome



their marginalization in terms of participating in and benefiting from development, as well as to address their exposure to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, to disproportionate forms of harassment and violence, and their exclusion from economic and political opportunities.

3. Participants underlined the importance of legal, policy and institutional reforms, backed by evidence-based analysis on the situation of women and girls of African descent, including their role as agents of change. Such evidence was critical to support informed policymaking, targeted interventions and actions that ensure full access for women and girls of African descent to social services and the tracking and measurement of progress to strengthen accountability for results.

Enhancing political participation, economic empowerment and access to social services for women of African descent

4. Participants underscored that women and girls of African descent play significant roles in shaping various development agendas. However, they also continue to encounter barriers in their access to social protection and public services such as health care, housing, education and judicial services, as well as other public and private services. They are also marginalized in political and economic life.

5. Participants provided examples of good practice, including legislation that prohibits and penalizes discrimination against women and girls of African descent, action plans that promote the provision of and access to social and legal services, and temporary special measures and affirmative action that broaden opportunities and enhance access to positions and that would otherwise not be available to them owing to their circumstances.

6. Speakers also presented examples of measures to establish dedicated budgetary allocations and special funds for economic and cultural initiatives of relevance to women and girls of African descent and to foster intercultural dialogue alongside the creation of intercultural offices at state level. Participants highlighted the role of education and awareness-raising as important vehicles for empowering women and enhancing their political participation, and drew attention to the many examples of women and girls of African descent who are leaders and role models. Examples of the provision of health care, including for sexual and reproductive health care, were also provided.

7. Participants called for the systematic collection of data on women and girls of African descent to allow for an evidence-based review and analysis of their situation and as a contribution to the midterm review for the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015–2024). There were proposals on the effective use of 2020 census data to enhance data availability. A suggestion was also made for the United Nations to adopt an international declaration on people of African descent.

Addressing the inequalities, discrimination and violence faced by women and girls of African descent

8. Participants raised concerns about the fact that racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and negative social norms and gender stereotypes produce unequal outcomes for women and girls of African descent. They highlighted that women and girls of African descent experience higher rates of sexual harassment and intimate partner violence, and are disproportionately affected, and stigmatized by, HIV/AIDS. Aggregated data often masked the disproportionate level of violence and sexual assault perpetrated against women and girls of African descent, including when perpetrated by public officials.

9. Participants noted some progress in addressing the discrimination and violence experienced by women and girls of African descent. Amendments to some national constitutions have paved the way for the recognition of equal rights for women and girls, including those of African descent. Sectoral policies, including national sustainable development, health and security policies, increasingly incorporate programmes to address violence against women of African descent and complement legislative frameworks. Participants also highlighted efforts to create platforms for women and girls of African descent from different countries to interact and engage in collective action to tackle discrimination and inequalities.

10. Participants stressed the need to accelerate action to effectively address, eliminate and prevent discrimination and violence against women and girls of African descent. They called for addressing racism through intergenerational dialogue, restoration projects and curriculum development. They also called for funding and capacity-building for statistics offices to enable the effective collection and analysis of data disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity and other socioeconomic factors. Participants further underscored the importance of targeted funding for research on issues that matter to and have an impact on women and girls of African descent.
