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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office
of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Promotion and protection of all human rights,
civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Summary report on the recommendations of the panel discussion on gender stereotyping and on women's human rights in the context of sustainable development agenda

**Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for
Human Rights***

Summary

Pursuant to its resolution 6/30, at its twenty-sixth session, the Human Rights Council held its annual full day of discussion on women's human rights on 17 June 2014. The discussions were divided into two panels. The first panel addressed the impact of gender stereotypes and gender stereotyping on the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of women's human rights. The second panel focused on the intersections between realizing women's rights and achieving sustainable development. The present report on the discussions was prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights pursuant to the Council's request.

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I. Introduction

1. During its twenty-sixth session, the Human Rights Council held its annual full day of discussion on women's human rights in accordance with its resolution 6/30. The full-day discussion took place on 17 June 2014. The discussions were divided into two panels. The first panel addressed the impact of gender stereotypes and gender stereotyping on the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of women's human rights. The second panel focused on the intersections between realizing women's rights and achieving sustainable development.

2. The present summary report sets out the main issues raised during the discussions including the conclusions and recommendations. As the two panels were separate but addressed related issues, the report presents the discussions under the two separate themes.

3. The summary report on the discussions was prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at the request of the Human Rights Council.

II. Panel I — The impact of gender stereotypes on the recognition and enjoyment of women's human rights

4. The panel on the impact of gender stereotypes on the recognition and enjoyment of women's human rights was moderated by Todd Minerson, Executive Director, White Ribbon Campaign, and composed of Dubravka Simonovic, Member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Simone Cusack, Lawyer, Veronica Undurraga, Law Professor, Adolfo Ibáñez University, and Yetnebersh Nigussi, Executive Director, Ethiopian Centre for Disability and Development.

A. Panel summary

5. In her opening statement, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stressed that the issue of gender stereotypes and its impact on women's human rights was of fundamental importance to every society. The High Commissioner said that in the past few decades, almost every State had acknowledged women's equality — in principle. Yet it was rarely fully realized. One problem was the lack of real commitment from decision makers, but another obstacle stemmed from deep-seated gender stereotypes about women's supposedly proper attributes, characteristics or place in the family and society. Women continued to be treated as dependants or minors by many justice systems, formal and informal, and according to the World Bank at least nine countries still had laws requiring women to obey their husbands, and many countries still conditioned women's access to health services on the authorization from a husband, father or brother. Even when the law itself was free of overt discrimination, gender stereotypes created tremendous obstacles to women's pursuit of justice, particularly in cases of gender-based violence, marriage and family, economic opportunities and women and adolescent girls' sexual and reproductive health. She recalled human rights obligations to eliminate harmful stereotypes and called on States to implement those obligations.

6. Ms. Simonovic spoke about the importance of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and outlined some of its

key provisions related to stereotyping. The issue of stereotyping could be analysed under multiple articles of the Convention, including those addressing the elimination of all forms of discrimination (art. 2), the obligation to modify gender stereotypes (art. 5), and the elimination of stereotypes in education (art. 10). She added that the Convention should be used as a comprehensive, legally binding instrument for the modification of sex and gender-based stereotypes that constituted discrimination against women.

7. Ms. Cusack shared her research on how judicial stereotyping undermined justice for women, explaining that judicial stereotyping posed a substantial barrier to justice for women, particularly for victims of gender-based violence. She referred to the several ways in which judicial stereotyping resulted in miscarriages of justice. First, it undermined justice by compromising impartiality. It also influenced judges' understanding of the nature of criminal offences and their perception of whether violence had or had not occurred. Stereotyping could further affect judges' view about the credibility of witnesses, as well as prevent judges from holding perpetrators accountable or even blame the victims for the attack experienced. That harm was continuing to play out and judicial stereotyping was an issue that had to be addressed if women were to achieve substantive equality.

8. Ms. Undurraga said that girls were stereotyped and treated as if they were not (or should not be) interested in sex, so health systems did not respond to the needs of girls according to their evolving capacities for autonomous behaviour. Girls became exposed to coercion, pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Other stereotypes included the notion that women were not able to take important decisions and needed the protection of their husbands or doctors, resulting in women being denied decision-making autonomy regarding contraception or abortion. The idea that women should always be available for their husbands denied them the right to decide when to engage in intercourse and made it difficult for women to win marital rape cases in courts. Stereotypes that women should sacrifice themselves for their children have provided the excuse to delay medical treatment to women when such treatment could affect the foetus. Stereotypes that grounded women's value on their fertility or capacity to perform domestic work, sustained practices such as forced marriage, sexual exploitation and domestic slavery.

9. Ms. Nigussie, addressing the situation of women with disabilities, reiterated that in many cases women were expected to be beautiful, fertile and dedicated to household work, and women with disabilities were regarded as lacking those attributes. She provided several examples of compounded stereotypes and their impact on women with disabilities, for instance, in certain places, if a sister of a woman with disability married, the woman with disability was also "given" to the husband. In another example, she said that in some communities, HIV-infected men targeted disabled women in the belief that their purity would cure them of HIV. She also pointed to the impact of stereotypes in access to justice, explaining that justice systems did not consider women with disabilities, including victims of violence, as reliable witnesses, hindering the ability of those women to claim justice. She called for enhanced efforts to effectively respond to the needs of women with disabilities.

10. Mr. Minerson, as the moderator, drew attention to the role of stereotypes in perpetuating certain conceptions of masculinity, and the impact that had had on eliminating violence against women. He explained that his organization was interested in the narrative surrounding masculinity and the way men dealt with violence, and also in breaking stereotypes of men as violent, aggressive, in control of money, not nurturing and loving. He stressed that it was important to change the

stereotypes of men and boys in order to create stronger allies for women and for women and girls' equality.

11. In the discussion that followed, speakers noted that progress had been made towards ensuring gender equality but many challenges remained on the path to true equality. Challenging gender stereotypes was the first step to combating discrimination against women. Several speakers expressed concern that gender stereotyping presented obstacles to achieving gender equality, ensuring women's rights, including their sexual and reproductive rights and the right to be free from violence. Some noted that gender stereotypes relegated women to a secondary position to men not only at home but also at work, where women performing the same tasks as men were often paid significantly less than men.

12. It was agreed that stereotypes were subtle and difficult to detect, often acting on the subconscious. The phenomenon had been amplified by new information and communication technologies, which could however also contribute to combating prejudice. Several speakers noted that education was one of the effective ways of combating harmful stereotypes.

13. Several States emphasized that because of their detrimental impact on society, gender stereotypes needed to be addressed at different levels and by different actors. In that regard, laws against discrimination and violence were crucial. Gender mainstreaming was key and measures must be taken to organize and evaluate policy processes to ensure that gender perspectives were included in all stages. In addition, public policies must ensure the neutrality of public institutions and promote a gender balance in areas such as education, where important disparities remained, as well as in economic and political life. It was acknowledged that governments alone and the implementation of public policies did not sufficiently address issues of gender inequality. Family and community leaders also had an important role to play in eliminating prejudices in the community. The most commonly called upon tool for combating gender stereotypes was the use of the mass media to broadcast awareness-raising campaigns. At the same time, there was an appeal for the media to be held accountable for messaging that contributed to the unequal gender narrative. Challenging gender stereotypes was the first step to combating discrimination against women and improving women's well-being.

14. It was agreed that the post-2015 framework must be based on human rights and all goals must be gender-mainstreamed.

15. Responding to some of the questions, panellists reiterated that stereotypes diminished the potential of all individuals, infantilized women, made them vulnerable to violence, and affected their self-esteem. It was noted that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provided guidance to States on eliminating gender stereotypes. Recommendations coming from the human rights treaty bodies in the area of stereotypes required concerted action by several actors, including, inter alia, relevant government ministries, parliament, the educational systems, and civil society organizations. The role of special procedures was also emphasized.

16. Panellists recommended that States take into consideration the diverse concerns and needs of all women, including women with disabilities, and for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to addressing gender stereotyping in all sectors of society, including in education, employment, marriage and family life. The role of both regional and international mechanisms to ensure accountability was further highlighted.

III. Panel II — Women’s human rights and the sustainable development agenda

17. The panel was composed of Saraswathi Menon, Director, Policy Division at UN Women; Frances Raday, Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice; Gita Sen, Professor of Public Policy, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore and Adjunct Professor of Global Health and Population, Harvard School of Public Health; Luisa Cabal, Vice-President of Programs, Center for Reproductive Rights, New York; and Kingsley Kariuki, Kenya Federation of Slum Dwellers. The panel was moderated by Sarah Cook, Director, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

A. Panel summary

18. In her opening statement, the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights recalled that although the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had made progress in sectors such as education and poverty reduction, the hidden reality of growing inequality, particularly for women, had not been adequately addressed. The new framework was an opportunity to embrace a more human rights-based agenda. The Deputy High Commissioner highlighted the need to ensure women’s economic, social and cultural rights, citing examples of land and sexual and reproductive health rights. Furthermore, she noted that one of the most glaring omissions of the MDGs was the failure to address violence against women and girls, despite the fact that that was a reality for many women and girls, and not only in conflict situations. She emphasized that the post-2015 agenda must establish a strong accountability mechanism to hold governments accountable for reaching the goals, identifying clear responsibilities to ensure that all actors, including private actors, were held to account, that institutions were answerable and that commitments were enforceable.

19. Ms. Menon focused her remarks on efforts made by UN Women in the discussions relating to the post-2015 development agenda. She reported that UN Women was advocating sustainable development goals that were based on human rights, gender equality and sustainability and which recognized multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. She called for a stand-alone goal on gender equality, which included explicit attention to women’s human rights. She also outlined the targets which UN Women was advocating, namely on discrimination against women, violence against women, sexual and reproductive health and rights, unpaid care and domestic work, property and land rights, and participation. She further emphasized the need to mainstream gender concerns across the entire framework. She expressed concern about the fact that unpaid care work and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) continued to be contested. She emphasized with regard to unpaid care work that it was the fundamental basis for sustaining societies, communities and households. With regard to SRHR, she said that population planning and interventions must not undermine women’s rights or bodily integrity.

20. Ms. Raday referred to the recent report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice which focused on discrimination against women in economic and social life. She reaffirmed the importance of a post-2015 framework that recognized women’s unpaid care work and that structural barriers to women’s economic opportunities, which existed as a result of women’s reproductive function and caring roles, should be dismantled. She called for unpaid care work to be integrated into macroeconomic policies, such as

tax policy, and to ensure a robust social protection floor. She also noted that the gender gap in women's participation in decision-making in the economic sphere needed to be addressed. Ms. Raday called for a goal on women's economic leadership in the post-2015 framework and for gender-sensitive analysis of corporate responsibility that identified, prevented and remedied the harm caused by corporate activities to women, as workers, consumers and community members, especially with regard to export processing zones, sweatshops, garment industries, land dispossession by extractive biofuels, agribusiness and real estate progress, in all of which most of the victims were women. She further drew attention to discrimination against women in formal employment and the need to address women's exploitation in informal labour and the alleviation of greater poverty of older women, a reflection of their lifetime of lesser economic opportunities. Finally, she recommended a gender-sensitive analysis of austerity measures.

21. Ms. Sen noted that the challenges of the post-2015 framework were in the details. She recalled some of the shortcomings of MDG 3, including narrow indicators for reaching the broad goal of gender equality. She warned that the current discussions on that subject were also facing some of the same gaps and omissions. In particular, while some human rights aspects and emphasis were implicit in the goals, they were not explicit, and were incomplete as well as inconsistent. She also noted that there was non-recognition of the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights. She offered the example of Goal 1, which included secure rights to own land, but questioned whether that was about equal rights or the right to equal land. In addition, the current discussions had not paid sufficient attention to adolescent girls specifically on the intersection between education and violence against women. She noted that the implementation of the goals also depended on whether sufficient funds would be allocated.

22. Ms. Cabal began by emphasizing that at the core of SRHR were the most intimate decisions in any individual's life — related to their bodies, their identities, their relationships, marriage, and if and when to have children. She highlighted some of the worrying statistics surrounding maternal health, unsafe abortion, child marriage, unmet need for contraception and HIV. She noted that ensuring SRHR was an end in itself, but also a precondition for the well-being of individuals and resilience of communities. As such, she pointed out that SRHR were priorities in their own right. She referred to three fundamental pillars of SRHR, namely, bodily integrity and autonomy, access to information and services, and non-discrimination. She also emphasized that ensuring SRHR was essential for gender equality. If women and girls could not enjoy their SRHR, their ability to claim other rights, including education and participation, was undermined. When women were empowered to make decisions about their bodies, they were able to make decisions about their lives more broadly. She further emphasized that ensuring SRHR was critical for sustainable development more generally.

23. Mr. Kariuki stressed the need to build inclusive and safe human settlements. He drew attention to the lack of basic services, in particular water and sanitation, in informal settlements. He noted that for women, access to sanitation in informal settlements was a particularly insecure experience and that that insecurity meant that in many instances, women were forced to delay the use of sanitation facilities to the times they considered to be most safe, a situation that exposed them to urinary tract infections and other serious health issues. That, in turn, had an impact on the financial resources available to women because they had to use the little money they had for medical treatment. He expressed concern about girls missing over a month of the school year due to menstruation and lack of sanitation facilities and the impact that that had on their right to education. Young girls did not often go to school during

their periods for lack of sanitary pads as well as fear of using toilets and sanitation facilities because they were unsafe and lacked water. He noted it was important to understand that the existence of slums was being exploited by cartels who profited from the higher prices charged for water, sanitation, rents (per square metre) and the fact that some politicians used slums as lucrative vote banks during elections. They would therefore not promote any slum improvement initiative that would reduce their number of votes if the informal settlements were decongested during improvement. That situation required urgent attention.

24. During the discussion, there was a consensus that the post-2015 development strategy must build on the gaps and lessons of the MDGs and around the inclusion of gender equality as a stand-alone goal in the new development agenda. States acknowledged the importance of continuing their efforts to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment across all of the goals especially health, education, poverty, food security and others.

25. It was noted that despite substantial progress towards achieving the MDGs, no country across the globe could claim to have achieved de facto gender equality. There could be no sustainable development without gender equality and the full participation of women and girls. The new development agenda must value women's potential and their contributions, paid and unpaid, to families, societies and economies. Some States stressed the importance of financing required for achieving the ambitious goals of the new development agenda and warned that unless financing could be guaranteed through national resources, private sector investment and official development assistance, the goals would remain aspirations.

26. Accountability and adequate resources provision was a recurrent concern expressed by State representatives and non-governmental organizations. Several speakers referred to the need for monitoring and evaluation frameworks to be built into the development agenda. Sex-disaggregated data was cited as vital to progress, as well as specific attention to budgets for achieving gender equality.

27. The need to validate care and unpaid work as a positive social good was emphasized repeatedly, as was ensuring women's access to productive resources, including credit. Violence against women and girls, including forced marriage, was also a topic raised by numerous speakers. Concern was further expressed about multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against women and girls due to their age, race or sexual orientation, or because they were indigenous persons, persons with disabilities, migrants, or belonging to certain minority or ethnic groups. SRHR were also mentioned as an area that should be addressed by the post-2015 framework.

28. Responding to some of the questions, panellists emphasized the importance of allocating specific funds for mainstreaming and the need for a contextualized approach when considering financing mechanisms, for example, debt swaps pegged against delivery or issues around secure tenure and water and sanitation services. The importance of adolescent girls, and the need to have them explicitly addressed in the post-2015 framework was also addressed, in particular with respect to their bodily autonomy and integrity as well as their right to comprehensive sexual education. Panellists also emphasized the role of the judiciary in upholding the rule of law, including remedies and compensation. It was agreed that disaggregated data needed to factor in sex and age in order to capture the situation of adolescents and of older women. It was noted that data were particularly important in view of the experience with violence against women, which the MDGs did not address because there were no data. As a result, considerable effort had been put into ensuring there was adequate data on violence against women in order to ensure better monitoring. It

was suggested that terminology such as “universal” or “for all” should be replaced with “women, men, boys and girls”. Concerning the means of implementation, it was suggested that it would make sense to mainstream that throughout, rather than having it as a separate focus area.

29. Regarding specific goals, it was recommended that the goal on health should uphold the right to health especially with regard to it being available, accessible, acceptable, appropriate and of good quality. It was critical to keep SRHR in the gender equality goal — because it was not just about health, but about dignity and autonomy in decision-making. Several other issues were also proposed as additions to the sustainable development goals, including access to de facto education (addressing non-attendance), maternity rights, positive measures to accelerate equality in decision-making in public and private sectors, advancing women’s entrepreneurship, covering all care services guaranteed by the social protection floor and inclusion in a tax framework, pensions and older women’s issues, more detail on violence against women, gender-sensitive budgeting and policies across the board.

30. In conclusion, Ms. Cook, panel moderator, noted the overwhelming consensus for a combination of a stand-alone gender goal together with a mainstream approach to gender. This was justified both on intrinsic (women’s rights) and instrumental grounds (that investing in girls and women was important for achieving all other goals). She highlighted the strong focus on issues related to care and unpaid work, the importance of focusing on adolescent girls, and discussions of budgeting and accountability mechanisms among many important points raised by the panellists and from the floor. The issue of how to increase awareness of men and boys about gender was also important for changing social norms and behaviour around gender. While evidence of progress and examples of how change happened existed, the question was currently how to bring onto the agenda some of the neglected issues and to find appropriate entry points to address deep-seated, structural and institutionalized gender constraints.

31. The discussion broadly affirmed the importance of ensuring a strong focus on gender equality in the post-2015 universal framework. Many speakers supported calls for a stand-alone goal covering women’s human rights and recognized that gender discrimination persisted in all regions of the world. The need to mainstream gender concerns across the entire framework was also emphasized. Multiple speakers drew attention to specific areas of women’s human rights that required attention, including women’s employment, addressing their unpaid work and reducing the care burden, ensuring basic services such as toilets and sanitation, eliminating gender-based violence, ensuring women’s participation, equal rights to land and other productive resources, and sexual and reproductive health. The need to ensure adequate financing and accountability mechanisms to achieve the goals in the new framework, and to ensure disaggregated data were available, were further central issues.