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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Sixtieth session

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Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters**

### Proposals for priority themes for future sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women

#### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report, prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2013/18, makes suggestions for the future priority and review themes of the Commission on the Status of Women.



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2013/18, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women, at its sixtieth session, a report containing proposals on the Commission's priority themes for its future sessions. The present report is submitted in response to that request. Since 1987, the Commission has used multi-year programmes of work. Following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/203, multi-year programmes of work covered the periods 1997-2000, 2002-2006 and 2007-2009. In 2009, priority and review themes were determined for the period 2010-2014, and in 2013, for 2016. Also in resolution 2013/18, the Commission was requested to decide, at its sixtieth session in 2016, on its future multi-year programme of work.

2. The Commission plays a central role in monitoring, reviewing and appraising progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at all levels. In its resolution 2015/6, the Economic and Social Council affirmed that the Commission will also contribute to the follow-up to the post-2015 development agenda, that is, the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, so as to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

3. In the same resolution, the Economic and Social Council also requested the Commission to continue to apply a thematic approach to its work and to adopt a multi-year programme of work to allow for predictability and adequate time for preparation. The Council asked that the Commission, in selecting its priority theme, take into consideration, in addition to the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the programme of work of the Council, as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, so as to build synergies and contribute to the work of the Council system and the high-level political forum on sustainable development. In addition, the Council decided that, at each session, the Commission will evaluate progress in the implementation of its agreed conclusions on a priority theme from a previous session as its review theme.

4. The selection of priority themes enables the Commission to add impetus to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in a manner that effectively responds to current trends and developments. As the Commission approaches this task for the years following 2016, the outcomes of the most recent major processes, as well as of upcoming events, should effectively be linked up to the findings of the 20-year review of progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the need for its full, effective and accelerated implementation. For greater impact, these linkages and synergies should inform the Commission's selection of its future priority themes. In addition, the Commission has a catalytic role in ensuring gender mainstreaming in the United Nations system, including in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The selection of priority themes can also be an effective means for the Commission to exercise this role through topical inputs to other intergovernmental processes from a gender perspective. It can also contribute to the follow-up to and implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

5. One important upcoming event is the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), which will take place in Quito from 17 to 20 October 2016. The Conference, which is aimed at reinvigorating the global commitment to sustainable urbanization, will focus on the implementation of the “New Urban Agenda” and will aim to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable urban development, assess accomplishments, address poverty and identify and address new and emerging challenges. The World Humanitarian Summit, which is to be held in Istanbul, Turkey, on 23 and 24 May 2016, is a global call to action by the Secretary-General. Among its other goals, the Summit aims to initiate a set of concrete actions and commitments aimed at enabling countries and communities to: better prepare for and respond to crises; be more resilient to shocks; and share innovations and best practices that can help to save lives around the world, put affected people at the centre of humanitarian action and alleviate suffering. At both conferences, the role and agency of women will be key subjects.

6. At the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, held on 22 and 23 September 2014, the Assembly invited the Commission to consider the issue of the empowerment of indigenous women at a future session (General Assembly resolution 69/2, para. 19). The theme of the Economic and Social Council for 2016 is “Implementing the post-2015 development agenda: moving from commitments to results”. Council themes for 2017 and beyond have not yet been determined. In its resolution adopting the Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report for consideration at its seventieth session, including guidance on the selection of annual themes and on options for periodic and thematic reviews for the high-level political forum (General Assembly resolution 70/1, para. 90).

## **II. Priority themes: 2017-2019**

7. At its sixtieth session, the Commission may wish to adopt its multi-year programme of work for the years from 2017 to 2019. Proposals for priority themes for these years are outlined below.

8. In 2017, the Commission may wish to consider as its priority theme: “Gender equality and the empowerment of women in the changing world of work”. The Beijing Platform for Action paid extensive attention to women and poverty and women and the economy, and called for the promotion of women’s economic rights and independence. Sustainable Development Goal 8, “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”, includes targets on full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men and addresses the labour rights of young people, persons with disabilities and migrant workers, in particular women migrants. Target 5.4 focuses on the recognition and the value of unpaid care and domestic work. There are thus strong synergies between the accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals. Addressing the changing world of work would be an opportunity to bring together a range of issues, from economic growth and development, employment and decent work to environmental sustainability.

9. The right to work is a fundamental human right. The international human rights framework is complemented by labour standards, in particular the

conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO), including the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (ILO Convention No. 111), the Equal Remuneration Convention (ILO Convention No. 100), the Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities (ILO Convention No. 156), the Convention on Maternity Protection (ILO Convention No. 183) and the Domestic Workers Convention (ILO Convention No. 189).

10. Women's experience of work ranges from unpaid care work to many levels of formal paid employment. While women's participation in the labour force has increased in recent years, they continue to be overrepresented in informal, insecure and vulnerable work, with little or no social protection. In this type of work, women tend to be paid less than in those areas of work where men predominate. The gender wage gap is a global phenomenon. In all regions, women spend far more time than men doing unpaid care work, which sustains communities and economies. Once paid and unpaid work are combined, women's average total work hours are greater than men's in 87 per cent of countries for which data are available. In addition, the range of opportunities for women remains constrained by pervasive gender stereotypes and social norms that affect their access to the labour market.

11. As illustrated in the ILO publication, *World Employment and Social Outlook — Trends 2015*, the world of work is changing dramatically for all workers, women and men. Globally, three quarters of workers are employed on temporary or short-term contracts, in informal jobs often without any contract, under own-account arrangements or in unpaid family jobs. In the context of rising inequality and poverty, workers face increased income insecurity.

12. Global supply chains and the so-called green economy increasingly affect work and employment opportunities everywhere, and their impact on women needs to be better understood so that policy responses can be developed in a targeted manner. While gender equality and women's empowerment are recognized as critical for achieving economic growth, evidence also suggests that economic growth does not necessarily lead to better or to more jobs, nor to greater equality for women.

13. These trends and current developments call for an examination of economic, social and environmental policies to improve women's access to decent work. A deeper analysis of constraints and opportunities in the changing world of work for groups of women, such as migrant women, women in rural areas, women entrepreneurs and women domestic workers, would be especially timely, to bring to the foreground inequalities and targeted policy responses. The goal of "leaving no one behind" requires attention to the situation of those women and girls who are furthest behind.

14. In 2018, the Commission may wish to consider as its priority theme: "Gender-responsive social protection systems to achieve substantive equality for women and girls". The Beijing Platform for Action gives some attention to the need for and access to social protection systems. Sustainable Development Goal 1, target 1.3, calls for nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors. Goal 5, target 5.4, makes the link between unpaid care and domestic work and social protection policies. Goal 10, target 10.4, calls for social protection policies as a means for progressively achieving greater equality. The implementation of the Platform for Action with regard to social protection could be accelerated through a strong link with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development. Addressing social protection systems in 2018 would enable the Commission to build on the insights and policy recommendations from an evaluation of the changing world of work, and to provide advice on how to make the right to social protection a reality for all women, regardless of their employment and work status.

15. Global policy attention to national social protection systems has advanced significantly since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action. One major development has been the adoption of ILO Recommendation No. 202 of 2012, which urges countries to commit to four basic guarantees<sup>1</sup> and recognizes that social protection is an important tool for the achievement of gender equality. At the same time, global policy guidance on how to make social protection gender-responsive remains limited. Too often the integration of gender equality considerations in social protection has been uneven and the specific risks and constraints that women face are not addressed. This is evident, for example, in the design of contributory pension schemes, which heavily penalize women and result in stark gender pension gaps, thereby increasing women's risk of poverty in old age, and the relative neglect of care services and other social services and infrastructure, which are particularly important for women's ability to pursue education, employment, political participation and other activities.

16. The 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action found mixed trends in social protection from a gender perspective. While social expenditures have been cut in some Member States in recent years, others have continued to roll out or have even scaled up their social protection efforts to relieve the poverty-inducing effects of economic crisis, food insecurity, climate change, demographic ageing and changes in family and household structures. In addition to enabling policies, such as job training and childcare services, many countries have implemented protective policies that can reduce women's poverty risk throughout the life cycle, including child benefits, conditional cash transfers, non-contributory old-age pensions as well as a range of subsidies for education, health and housing.

17. Given the increasing global attention to the role of social protection, the Commission could build on the findings of the 20-year review of the Platform for Action and develop specialist policy guidance on making national social protection systems work for women to achieve substantive equality, with attention to different levels of economic development and changing economic, social and environmental contexts. The impact of different social protection components, such as transfers and services, on gender equality need to be further examined in order to facilitate the development of policy measures and programmes for effectively integrating gender equality into the design and implementation of specific social protection programmes, including child and family transfers, pensions, public works programmes, health services, care services and water and sanitation and energy services. Experiences with universal versus targeted social protection, social

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<sup>1</sup> These are: (a) access to a nationally defined set of goods and services, constituting essential health care, including maternity care, that meets the criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality; (b) basic income security for children, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services; (c) basic income security, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, in particular in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability; and (d) basic income security, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, for older persons.

accountability mechanisms and the financing of social protection systems need to be examined in order to obtain better results for women and girls.

18. In 2019, the Commission may wish to consider as its priority theme: “Sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls”. The Beijing Platform for Action highlights the relevance of economic and social infrastructure for women’s empowerment in a number of policy recommendations, which call for public investment for economic infrastructure, such as water and sanitation, energy, transport and road construction and call on Governments to integrate a gender perspective in the design and implementation of environmentally sound and sustainable infrastructure development in rural and urban areas.

19. A number of the Sustainable Development Goals address infrastructure issues: Goal 9 includes a focus on sustainable and resilient infrastructure to support economic development and human well-being; Goal 5, target 5.4, includes infrastructure as a key element in addressing the need to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work; Goal 6, on water and sanitation for all, recognizes the needs of women and girls; Goal 7, target 7.b, calls for expanded infrastructure for supplying modern and sustainable energy services; and Goal 11, target 11.2, calls for access to sustainable transport systems for all, with special attention to the needs of women and other groups.

20. Women’s access to quality infrastructure, in particular water and sanitation, energy and transport, is essential for the eradication of women’s poverty, and such access would contribute to the full realization of their human rights. Women’s workload, paid and unpaid, in rural and urban areas is often negatively affected by the planning and development of infrastructure that does not take into account the division of labour between women and men in terms of access to markets, natural resource management and the need to collect water and fuel. Women living in rural and disadvantaged areas face additional challenges. Inadequate infrastructure can further increase women’s unpaid work, especially in the context of economic crisis, environmental degradation and natural disasters.

21. As the 20-year review of the implementation of the Platform for Action illustrated, macroeconomic and social policies that make gender equality and the empowerment of women an explicit concern encourage a focus on an increased mobilization of resources to finance investments in infrastructure that is sustainable and resilient. Investments in water and sanitation, safe transport and sustainable energy can contribute to the reduction of women’s unpaid work, strengthen their access to markets and decent work and enhance their mobility in carrying out a range of activities.

22. The Commission could consider the role of sustainable infrastructure in an integrated way, bringing together social, economic and environmental considerations, with the overall objective of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. There is a need for a greater understanding of the way in which the design and investment in infrastructure — in water and sanitation, energy and transportation — can enable or hinder progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women, especially in regard to such considerations as distance, safety, quality and affordability. An examination of levels of participation in, and the transparency of, infrastructure development processes would also be important for the attainment of inclusive and sustainable results. Investments in infrastructure,

from a range of sources, need to be examined so that they may ensure universal access and reach all women and girls, including the most marginalized groups, in order to reduce inequalities and eradicate poverty.

### **III. Review themes for the years from 2017 to 2019**

23. At its sixtieth session, the Commission may also wish to determine the review themes for the years from 2017 to 2019. Proposals for review themes for these years are outlined below.

24. According to its methods of work, at each session, the Commission will evaluate progress in the implementation of its agreed conclusions on a priority theme of a previous session as its review theme, through an interactive dialogue consisting of representatives of Member States of different regions, on a voluntary basis, presenting their lessons learned, challenges and best practices and ways to support and achieve accelerated implementation, including through addressing data gaps and challenges in the enhanced collection, reporting, use and analysis of data.

25. For the years from 2017 to 2019, the Commission would have the opportunity to evaluate the implementation of the agreed conclusions from its fifty-eighth session in 2014, on challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls, and from its sixtieth session in 2016, on “women’s empowerment and its link to sustainable development”. At its fifty-ninth session in 2015, on the occasion of the 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Commission adopted a Political Declaration. This means that two sets of agreed conclusions may be reviewed during the three-year period from 2017 to 2019.

26. In order to allow sufficient time for implementation, the Commission may wish to consider reviewing the implementation of its agreed conclusions from the sixtieth session in 2019.

27. The agreed conclusions adopted at the fifty-eighth session in 2014 made a major contribution in that they assessed: the situation of women and girls in regard to each of the Millennium Development Goals; critical issues related to gender equality and the empowerment of women that were not adequately addressed by the Millennium Development Goals; and factors that had held back the achievement of the Goals for women and girls. The Commission called for action by Governments and other stakeholders in five areas. Since then, the Sustainable Development Goals have been adopted, including Goal 5, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, which replaces and expands on Millennium Development Goal 3, “Promote gender equality and empower women”.

28. The Commission could therefore consider, as its review theme for 2017, evaluating progress in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5. Such an evaluation could build on the lessons learned identified in its agreed conclusions from the fifty-eighth session, but place specific emphasis on Goal 5 and its targets. Such a review by the Commission would contribute to the follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

29. Furthermore, the Commission could consider, as its review theme for 2018, evaluating progress, from a gender perspective, in the implementation of the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, thereby contributing further to the

follow-up to the 2030 Agenda. Such a review could provide insights into the impact of the Agenda on women and girls and women's full and effective participation and leadership in decision-making in political, economic and public life.

30. In both 2017 and 2018, the format for the review would follow the methods of work of the Commission. The review would also be supported by a report by the Secretary-General on progress made on the theme of the review at the national level. The outcome of the discussion on the review theme would be in the form of a summary by the Chair of the Commission, as outlined in the Commission's methods of work.

#### **IV. Summary: proposed priority and review themes for the years from 2017 to 2019**

31. The proposed priority and review themes for the sixty-first, sixty-second and sixty-third sessions of the Commission are set out below:

- (a) Sixty-first session (2017):
  - Priority theme: Women's rights and empowerment in the changing world of work
  - Review theme: Progress in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"
- (b) Sixty-second session (2018):
  - Priority theme: Gender-responsive social protection systems to achieve substantive equality for women and girls
  - Review theme: Progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for women and girls
- (c) Sixty-third session (2019):
  - Priority theme: Sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls
  - Review theme: Women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development (agreed conclusions from the sixtieth session)

#### **V. Focus on 2020**

32. When determining its multi-year programme of work at its sixtieth session, the Commission may also wish to consider how best to utilize the year 2020 for the accelerated realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In the Political Declaration, Member States committed themselves to using all opportunities and processes in 2015 and beyond to accelerate the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in order to achieve concrete results in each review cycle, and to striving for the full realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women by 2030.

33. Member States have undertaken four comprehensive reviews and appraisals of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (in 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015). The first review, the five-year review, which was conducted in the form of a special session of the General Assembly in 2000, resulted in the adoption of a Political Declaration and further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The three subsequent reviews were conducted by the Commission in 2005 ([E/2005/27](#)), 2010 ([E/2010/27](#)) and 2015 ([E/2015/27](#)). At its 10-year and 15-year reviews in 2005 and 2010, the Commission adopted a declaration, and at its 20-year review in 2015 it adopted a Political Declaration. Each of these global reviews were preceded by national and regional reviews, the results of which were synthesized and reflected in reports of the Secretary-General submitted to the Commission, identifying trends in national implementation and priorities for future action (see [E/CN.6/2000/2](#), [E/CN.6/2005/2](#) and Corr.1, [E/CN.6/2010/2-E/2010/4](#) and [E/CN.6/2015/3](#)).

34. The Commission may wish to consider options with regard to the most effective format and outcome, with the greatest impact, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 2020, including the convening of all stakeholders to conduct a review and consider new initiatives for achieving gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and realization of their human rights.

35. Based on recent high-level events at the United Nations, such options could include: a summit at the level of Heads of State and Government; a world or international conference which could include Heads of State and Government as well as high-level ministerial participation; a special session of the General Assembly; or a high-level forum where participation would include Heads of State and Government. There could also be options for an outcome, or outcomes, from an event, such as a short political declaration or a more comprehensive outcome, to accelerate the full realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women by 2030. Also possible would be a review by the Commission itself of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, with a focus on the linkages with and progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

## Annex

### **Priority and review themes considered by the Commission on the Status of Women: 2006-2015**

#### **Fiftieth session (2006):**

*(Two themes)*

- Enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work
- Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels

#### **Fifty-first session (2007):**

- Priority theme: Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child
- Review theme: The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality

#### **Fifty-second session (2008):**

- Priority theme: Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women
- Review theme: Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peacebuilding

#### **Fifty-third session (2009):**

- Priority theme: The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS
- Review theme: Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels

#### **Fifty-fourth session (2010):**

- Fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

#### **Fifty-fifth session (2011):**

- Priority theme: Access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work
- Review theme: The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

**Fifty-sixth session (2012):**

- Priority theme: The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges
- Review theme: Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women

**Fifty-seventh session (2013):**

- Priority theme: Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls
- Review theme: The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS

**Fifty-eighth session (2014):**

- Priority theme: Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls
- Review theme: Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work

**Fifty-ninth session (2015):**

- Twenty-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

**Sixtieth session (2016):**

- Priority theme: Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development
  - Review theme: The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls
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