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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”**

Ways and means to further enhance the impact of the work of the Commission on the Status of Women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, prepared in compliance with Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/15](#), contains a review of the functioning of the methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women, taking into consideration the outcome of the process of alignment of the agendas of the General Assembly and the Council and its subsidiary bodies, with a view to further enhancing the impact of its work.

* [E/CN.6/2022/1](#).



I. Introduction

1. The present report, prepared in compliance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/15, provides an overview of the methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women that have been in place since 2006 and were confirmed in 2009 and 2015 (see Council resolutions 2006/9, 2009/15 and 2015/6, respectively); a review of the functioning of those methods of work, including recommendations for consideration by the Commission with a view to further enhancing the impact of its work; and a discussion on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly (see Assembly resolution 75/325), the strengthening of the Council (see Assembly resolutions 72/305 and 75/290 A) and opportunities and implications for the work of the Commission.

2. The review by the Commission of the functioning of its methods of work provides an opportunity to strengthen the impact of its work on the basis of lessons learned about what works and what could be further refined and improved, with a view to making the Commission more effective and strategic and enhancing its monitoring capacity.

II. Mandate, programme of work and role of the Commission

Mandate and terms of reference

3. The mandate and terms of reference of the Commission have evolved since its establishment by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 11 (II) of 21 June 1946. In that resolution, the Council mandated the Commission to prepare recommendations and reports on promoting women's rights in political, economic, social and educational fields and to make recommendations on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights. The objectives of the Commission are to promote the principle that men and women should have equal rights and to develop proposals to give effect to recommendations in that regard. In its resolution 1987/22, the Council expanded the terms of reference of the Commission to include the functions of promoting the objectives of equality, development and peace, monitoring the implementation of measures for the advancement of women, and reviewing and appraising progress made at the national, subregional, regional, sectoral and global levels.

4. Following the Fourth World Conference of Women, in 1995, the General Assembly decided in its resolution 50/203 that the Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission, in accordance with their respective mandates, would constitute a three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism that would play the primary role in the overall policymaking and follow-up, and in coordinating the implementation and monitoring of the Platform for Action adopted at the Conference.

5. In 1996, the Economic and Social Council again expanded the terms of reference of the Commission to include assisting the Council in monitoring, reviewing and appraising progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at all levels and advising the Council thereon (see Council resolution 1996/6). It also decided that the Commission would have a catalytic role in mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and programmes. After the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", in 2000 (see Assembly resolutions S-23/2 and S-23/3), the Assembly, in its resolution 55/71, confirmed the Commission's primary responsibility for the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session. In its resolution 2015/6, the Council affirmed that the Commission would

contribute to the follow-up to the post-2015 development agenda (i.e. the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) so as to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Council also decided that the Commission would report on the aspects relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women of the agreed main theme of the Council, in order to contribute to its work.

Programme of work

6. Since 1987, the Commission has discharged its mandate through the use of a multi-year programme of work (Economic and Social Council resolutions [1987/24](#), [1990/15](#), 1996/6, 2001/4, 2006/9, 2009/15, [2013/18](#), [2016/3](#) and [2020/15](#)) by which the Commission determines, in advance, the thematic issues to be discussed over, on average, a subsequent three- to five-year period. The number of issues taken up each year and the focus of the consideration have evolved over time, as outlined below.

7. Following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Commission applied a focused and thematic approach to its multi-year programme of work that reflected the critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action. This approach was later endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1998/46, in which it noted the importance of the use of multi-year thematic programmes by its functional commissions, especially in relation to the follow-up to major United Nations conferences.

8. During the period from 1997 to 1999, the Commission considered at each session a cluster of critical areas of concern from the Beijing Platform for Action (see Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/6). In the period from 2002 to 2006, also building on the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the Commission's programme of work contained two thematic items at each session. Since 2007, the Commission has considered one priority theme and one review theme at each session (see Council resolutions 2006/9 and [2015/6](#)). It has conducted a 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 at five-year intervals, in 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2020 (see Council resolutions 2001/4, 2009/15, [2013/18](#) and [2018/8](#)). The Commission will make a recommendation at its sixty-sixth session, in 2022, on how best to utilize the year 2025, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women (see Council resolution [2020/15](#)).

9. As part of its work, the Commission receives and considers every year communications relating to the status of women.¹ This is governed by several Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions, including resolution [76 \(V\)](#), establishing a procedure by which the Commission would receive and consider communications relating to the status of women; resolution [304 I \(XI\)](#), amending resolution [76 \(V\)](#); resolution [1983/27](#), reaffirming the mandate of the Commission to consider confidential and non-confidential communications on the status of women and authorizing it to appoint a working group to consider such communications and prepare a report thereon for the Commission; resolution [1993/11](#), reaffirming that the Commission was empowered to make recommendations to the Council on what action should be taken on emerging trends and patterns of discrimination against women revealed by such communications; decision 2002/235, making the communications procedure of the Commission more effective and efficient; and resolution 2009/16,

¹ Any individual, non-governmental organization, group or network may submit to the Commission on the Status of Women complaints, appeals or petitions containing information relating to alleged violations of human rights that affect the status of women in any country in the world. Those are referred to as "communications".

deciding that the Commission should appoint the members of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women for a two-year period. In its decision 2002/235, the Council requested the Secretary-General to publicize the communications procedure of the Commission.

Importance of the Commission

10. The Commission is the unchallenged leader on issues of gender equality and the empowerment of women at the global level. It is a deliberative, consensus-building and policymaking body that has one of the highest profiles of any of the intergovernmental bodies that meet at the United Nations. It attracts Heads of State and Government, dozens of ministers and senior government officials with large national delegations to its annual sessions, as well as broad representation by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders. Participation at that level is confirmation that Governments and other stakeholders value the annual discussion and the dialogue that take place on the good practices, gaps, challenges and further actions required to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

11. In its resolution [64/289](#), the General Assembly took action to strengthen the institutional arrangements for the support of gender equality and the empowerment of women by establishing the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). In that resolution, the Assembly decided that the Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission would constitute the multi-tiered intergovernmental governance structure for normative support functions and would provide normative policy guidance to UN-Women.

Catalytic role of the Commission

12. The Commission, in the exercise of its mandate, acts as a catalyst in support of gender mainstreaming in all areas of work of the United Nations (see the Beijing Platform for Action, para. 320, and Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/6), including in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (see Council resolution [2015/6](#)). It has done so by, inter alia, expanding its cooperation with other intergovernmental processes and functional commissions through the exchange of information, joint informal interactive events and the participation of its Chair in relevant processes, thereby assisting such bodies in the integration of a gender perspective in their work.

13. The Commission has continued to interact with other functional commissions and their respective secretariats. In recent years, that collaboration has been most successful and sustained with the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, the Statistical Commission and the United Nations Forum on Forests, including through several joint side events and panel discussions that have enabled the commissions to exchange views on issues of common interest.

14. At the same time, the Chairs of other commissions have been invited to address the Commission on the Status of Women on substantive issues of common interest, and to share with it their experiences with stakeholder participation, the follow-up to outcomes and other aspects pertaining to methods of work. In turn, the Chair of the Commission has addressed other commissions on topics also considered by the Commission on the Status of Women. Such interaction increased the impact of the Commission's catalytic role.

III. Organization and methods of work of the Commission, and recommendations

15. The methods of work adopted by the Economic and Social Council in 2006 (see resolution 2006/9) and confirmed following a review of their functioning in 2009 (see resolution 2009/15) responded to the changes in the number of thematic issues considered at each session. They also responded to new expectations that emanated from intergovernmental mandates, especially after the adoption in 2005 of the Declaration of the Commission on the Status of Women on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Council decision 2005/232). In its resolution 2006/9, the Council recognized that the organization of work of the Commission should contribute to advancing the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and reiterated that provision in its resolution 2009/15.

16. The current methods of work (see Council resolution [2015/6](#)) provide for the consideration of one priority theme and one review theme at each session, as determined in a multi-year programme of work; discussion of emerging issues, trends, focus areas and new approaches to questions affecting the situation of women, including equality between women and men, that require timely consideration, as needed; and participation of stakeholders, including NGOs. These issues are discussed below.

17. The methods of work seek to contribute to advancing and accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly at all levels. They are aimed at providing increased opportunities for sharing and exchanging ideas, experiences, lessons learned and good practices from the national level through interactive dialogue and events, with the participation of high-level officials and experts. They foster engagement on issues and seek to strengthen the Commission's contribution to the work of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum on sustainable development. In view of the traditional importance of NGOs in the promotion of gender equality, the Commission has encouraged such organizations to participate in its work.

Multi-year programme of work

18. The Commission has continued to apply a thematic approach to its work and to adopt a multi-year programme of work, encompassing one priority theme and one review theme at each session. The thematic approach has enabled the Commission to undertake a systematic follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action and to take up themes and issues that require further consideration in the light of new developments. It has also allowed predictability and adequate time for substantive preparations and strengthened the Commission's capacity to undertake a careful analysis of the selected themes.

19. In selecting its priority theme, the Commission takes 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 Economic and Social Council and the 2030 Agenda so as to build synergies and contribute to the work of the Council system and the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Aligning the Commission's themes with the programme of the Council has not always been possible, owing to the difference in the periodicity of the themes of the Council and the Commission. In such cases, the provision for the consideration

of an emerging issue or focus area can be an opportunity for the Commission to address topics relevant to the annual theme of the Council.

20. In 2020, the Commission approved its multi-year programme of work for 2021–2024. It will make a recommendation at its sixty-sixth session on how best to utilize the year 2025, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

21. The experience with the use of a multi-year programme of work has been positive. Consideration of only one priority theme at each session has facilitated the in-depth examination of the theme, and the review of the outcomes of that consideration after several sessions has enhanced the Commission's capacity to monitor progress, thus strengthening accountability for follow-up.

Priority theme

22. In accordance with its methods of work, the Commission considers one priority theme at each session, based on the Beijing Platform for Action, the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and possible linkages to the 2030 Agenda, so as to build synergies and contribute to the work of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Between 2016 and 2021, and excluding 2020, when it undertook the 25-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 Assembly, the Commission considered the following five priority themes: women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development (2016); women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work (2017); challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls (2018); social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (2019); and women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (2021).

23. In support of the Commission's consideration of the priority theme, the Secretary-General is mandated to submit to the Commission, on an annual basis, a report on the priority theme, including conclusions and recommendations for further action.

24. The report enables the Secretary-General to provide the substantive evidence base to underpin the Commission's deliberations, and resulting recommendations for action to accelerate progress. The use of expert group meetings to elaborate inputs for the priority theme further deepens the substantive preparations. These expert group meetings, which are convened by UN-Women as the substantive secretariat of the Commission, bring together cutting-edge knowledge, experience and expertise on the subject matter under consideration, and the recommendations that result from the meetings enhance the basis for action by policymakers.

25. The Commission achieves a sustained focus on the selected priority theme through several components of its methods of work, including the general discussion, ministerial round tables and not more than two interactive expert panels or interactive dialogues.

26. In the general discussion on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, emphasis is placed on goals attained, achievements, gaps and challenges in relation to implementation with regard to the priority theme. In addition to Member States, representatives of civil society, intergovernmental organizations and the United

Nations system participate in the general discussion. The number of speakers in the general discussion has remained steadily high (207 in 2016, 213 in 2017, 216 in 2018, 220 in 2019 and 192 in 2021),² and the Commission uses the practice of limiting the length of statements to ensure efficiency and good time management. Among the 192 pre-recorded speakers in 2021, there were two Heads of State, two vice-presidents, four deputy prime ministers and 112 ministers from Member States, as well as 21 representatives of NGOs accredited with the Economic and Social Council.

27. The general discussion is an essential space for representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the United Nations system to present their views on the current status of gender equality. The number and level of participants confirm the importance of the Commission as the primary global forum for Member States to share their perspectives on progress and challenges and for gender equality advocates from different institutional backgrounds to gather in solidarity around a common cause.

28. Four ministerial round tables at the beginning of the session, with the participation of ministers from Member States and other high-level officials from national capitals, focus on experiences, lessons learned and good practices related to the priority theme. A discussion guide presents possible questions for consideration. In order to promote interaction, speakers have been encouraged to be brief, to ask questions and to offer comments on interventions made during the dialogue. While the presentation of written statements is discouraged and no list of speakers is established, the format of the interaction is comparable to that of the general discussion. Interest in the high-level round table is consistently high and, on average, well over 80 ministers and other senior government officials participate. A small number of invited senior representatives from the United Nations system (usually one per round table) participate in the discussion. The outcome is presented in a summary by the Chair.

29. The Commission further discusses the priority theme in not more than two interactive expert panels or other interactive dialogues, focusing on ways and means to accelerate the implementation of commitments in the context of current challenges. The report of the Secretary-General and the panellists' presentations frame the discussion. These dialogues identify key policy initiatives and strategies in order to accelerate implementation on the basis of an exchange of national, regional and global experiences, lessons learned, good practices and new insights based on evidence, research and evaluation, with an emphasis on results achieved, and to strengthen dialogue and commitment for further action. These insights are channelled towards strengthening the global policy framework. Participants in those dialogues and panels include experts from Governments, the United Nations system, civil society, national human rights institutions, where they exist, and other stakeholder groups that work on the theme under consideration. Interest in those events has remained consistently high: frequently, more delegations and representatives of NGOs ask to contribute to the discussion than can be accommodated within the allotted time. The outcome of the interactive dialogue is in the form of a summary by the Chair.

30. While the discussions have attracted many speakers, the interactive nature of the dialogues and the focus on the topic at hand could be enhanced through a more free-flowing exchange among participants. Interventions could focus more strongly on the impact of actions and on results achieved rather than on processes and

² In the light of concerns regarding the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the sixty-fourth session was scaled down and held without a general discussion. The sixty-fifth session was held in a hybrid format with a virtual general discussion consisting of pre-recorded video statements.

activities. The discussions could be expanded to include intersectional or intergenerational perspectives in relation to the priority theme.

31. The current methods of work make provision for the outcome of the Commission's annual discussions on the priority theme to be in the form of short and succinct agreed conclusions, negotiated by all Member States, focusing on action-oriented recommendations for steps and measures for closing remaining gaps, meeting challenges and accelerating implementation, to be taken by Governments, relevant intergovernmental bodies, mechanisms and entities of the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders, and for the agreed conclusions to be widely disseminated to the United Nations system and made widely available by all Member States to the public at the national level, so as to encourage follow-up action.

32. The conclusions identify gaps and challenges in the implementation of previous commitments and contain action-oriented recommendations for all States, relevant intergovernmental bodies, mechanisms and entities of the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders in order to accelerate the implementation of the commitments. The level of detail of the agreed conclusions has fluctuated with, for example, 40 actions in 2016, 57 in 2017, 71 in 2018, 71 in 2019 and 62 in 2021.

33. The Commission's agreed conclusions are adopted by consensus and contain a general or preambular section followed by actions directed to Governments and other stakeholders. Since the introduction of the current methods of work, the Commission has adopted all outcomes by consensus and has been able to complete its work within the two-week session. As part of the negotiation process, the Commission has conducted informal meetings prior to the session and spent long hours in negotiations to ensure the timely completion of its work on the last day of the session. A total of 95 hours were spent negotiating agreed conclusions in 2016, 98 hours in 2017, 82 hours in 2018, 78 hours in 2019 and a record 145.5 hours for the virtual negotiations in 2021. In 2020, Member States spent 70 hours negotiating the political declaration. Negotiations often take place in parallel to official meetings; however, Member States have indicated that this poses significant challenges for delegations with limited capacity. The agreed conclusions adopted since 2016 average 20 pages per session, with 17 pages in 2018, 19 pages in 2017 and 22 pages in 2019 and 2021. Furthermore, on average, 47 per cent of each set of agreed conclusions adopted between 2016 and 2021 comprises previously agreed language, pointing to the amount of time spent every year renegotiating previously agreed language.

34. The Commission uses the format of resolutions for its other action-oriented outcomes. There is an understanding among members of the Commission of the desirability of taking action by consensus. If consensus is not possible, the Commission takes action by voting, in accordance with the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council.

Review theme

35. In accordance with its methods of work, the Commission evaluates each year progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on a priority theme of a previous session, as its review theme, through an interactive dialogue. Since 2016, the review themes have been the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls (2016); challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls (2017); participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women (2018); and women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development (2019 and 2021).

36. The Secretary-General is mandated to submit to the Commission, on an annual basis, a report on progress at the national level in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on a priority theme of a previous session.

37. The format of the review entails the presentation by Member States of different regions, on a voluntary basis, of their lessons learned, challenges and best practices that identify means for accelerated implementation through national and regional experiences. In the presentations, Member States also identify ways to support and achieve accelerated implementation, including by addressing data gaps and challenges in the enhanced collection, reporting, use and analysis of data related to the theme, at the national, regional and global levels. Presentations are followed by comments and questions by “partner” countries, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations system entities or civil society organizations identified by the presenting Member States and are followed by brief responses by the presenters.

38. The consideration of a review theme to evaluate progress in the implementation of the outcome on the priority theme of a previous session has enhanced the Commission’s capacity to monitor progress on commitments made and has thus enhanced the accountability of stakeholders. The Commission uses interactive dialogues, which provide an important opportunity to maintain a focus on previously adopted policy recommendations. This exchange of experiences, lessons learned and good practices enables the Commission to further monitor progress and gaps and challenges in those substantive areas at the national level and to promote accelerated implementation. Improvements could be achieved by providing concrete evidence and monitoring in order to help the Commission to evaluate progress achieved.

39. The outcome of the discussion on the review theme is in the form of a summary by the Chair of the Commission, prepared in consultation with the regional groups, through the members of the Bureau.

Emerging issue and focus area theme

40. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution [2015/6](#), the Commission, as necessary, continues to discuss emerging issues, trends, focus areas and new approaches to questions affecting the situation of women, including equality between women and men, that require timely consideration, taking into account developments at the global and regional levels as well as planned activities within the United Nations, where increased attention to gender perspectives is required, and with attention to relevant issues on the agenda of the Council. The topic is identified prior to the session by the Bureau of the Commission, in consultation with all Member States through their regional groups. In selecting the topic, the Bureau takes into account developments at the global and regional levels as well as planned activities within the United Nations, where increased attention to gender perspectives is required. Since 2016, the Commission has considered two topics through an interactive dialogue: the empowerment of indigenous women, in 2017, and women and girls of African descent, in 2019.

41. Concept notes prepared by the Secretariat, complemented by panels of experts and other invited participants to launch the discussions, facilitate the Commission’s consideration of the topics. The outcome of the discussion on the emerging issue, trend, focus area or new approach is in the form of a summary by the Chair of the Commission, prepared in consultation with the regional groups, through the members of the Bureau.

42. The emerging issue theme provides a flexible and timely opportunity for the Commission to select a current topic for consideration, thereby complementing its multi-year programme of work and predetermined priority and review themes. Using that format, the Commission has been able to address issues that required its attention

and to exercise its catalytic role by contributing gender perspectives to the broader intergovernmental agenda of the United Nations, while also systematically deepening the normative and policy framework on gender equality and women's empowerment. This is also an opportunity for the Commission to contribute to the annual main theme of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

Participation of stakeholders

43. The Commission's methods of work envisage broad participation from a range of stakeholders (see Economic and Social Council resolutions 2006/9 and [2015/6](#)). Consequently, the Commission attracts a very large number of participants to its annual sessions, including stakeholders from a multitude of sectors and categories. Many national delegations are led by government ministers and include senior officials and technical experts, and several include civil society representatives. Technical experts from national capitals sometimes attend for the duration of the session and participate in panel discussions and the consideration of other items, as well as in negotiations on the Commission's outcomes. This political and expert participation confirms the importance that stakeholders attach to the annual sessions of the Commission.

44. In his report entitled "Our Common Agenda", the Secretary-General encouraged Member States to strengthen efforts towards gender equality in all United Nations intergovernmental processes and for the greater inclusion of young women's voices in all decision-making spaces. The review of the Commission's methods of work could include a reassessment of the role of the Commission in relation to other intergovernmental mandates and consideration of how to build on the multi-stakeholder momentum of the Generation Equality Forum.

Ministerial segment

45. It is the established practice of the Commission to open sessions at the ministerial level. The Commission's high-visibility opening commonly include the participation of the Secretary-General, the President of the Economic and Social Council, the President of the General Assembly and other senior officials, as well as representatives of civil society and of young people. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of UN-Women, the Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences also deliver addresses at the opening meeting.

46. The Commission's methods of work make provision for a ministerial segment to reaffirm and strengthen political commitment to the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as their human rights, and to ensure high-level engagement and the visibility of its deliberations. The segment includes ministerial round tables or other high-level interactive dialogues to exchange experiences, lessons learned and good practices, as well as a general discussion on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Statements made during the general discussion identify goals attained, achievements made and efforts under way to close gaps and meet challenges in relation to the priority theme and the review theme. Such statements continue to be subject to strict time limits that are determined prior to the session by the Bureau of the Commission and consistently applied by the Chair.

47. An alternative may be the option of a closing segment at the ministerial level, which could provide added impetus for all stakeholders to follow up and take action

in accordance with the adopted outcome, thus increasing the impact of the Commission's work.

Participation of non-governmental organizations

48. NGOs have made significant contributions to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In its resolutions 1996/6 and 1996/31 of 22 and 25 July 1996, respectively, the Economic and Social Council decided that such organizations should be encouraged to participate, to the maximum extent possible, in the work of the Commission and in the monitoring and implementation process related to the Fourth World Conference on Women.

49. There has been a significant increase in the number of representatives from NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council attending the annual sessions of the Commission. In 2013, just under 2,900 representatives from approximately 325 organizations attended. By 2016, more than 4,200 representatives from almost 550 organizations attended the sixtieth session of the Commission. That number increased to a record of over 5,200 NGO representatives from 137 countries in 2019. These numbers confirm the high interest and enhanced engagement by civil society in the work of the Commission, and their contribution to the current thinking on global policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and in the localization and implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

50. At present, NGO representatives may participate in the general discussion, interactive dialogues and expert panels through written statements, as well as in side events. Owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, NGOs were able to contribute to the sixty-fifth session of the Commission virtually, by means of pre-recorded video statements and remote live interventions. However, the opportunities for them to contribute are limited, as they are only able to speak at the end of the general discussion, time permitting. Their inability to participate in the closed meetings for purposes of negotiations remains a recurring disappointment. As the agreed conclusions are the main outcome of the session, not being able to participate in negotiations remains a major barrier to the value and expertise that civil society can add to the discussions. NGOs have requested to be included in the negotiations on the agreed conclusions, and at a minimum to be allowed to designate a small number of regionally diverse representatives to observe the negotiations. As observers, they would be able to follow the negotiations and enhance their understanding of and contribution to the work of the Commission.

51. The number of written statements submitted by NGOs or groups of NGOs between 2016 and 2021 has been consistently high, with more than 130 statements issued for any one session, and a particularly high number of 206 statements for the review session held in 2020.

52. NGOs continue to convene a large number of parallel events in the vicinity of United Nations Headquarters, as well as online during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also frequently co-sponsor side events organized by Member States and United Nations system entities at Headquarters. Civil society representatives attend those parallel and side events in large numbers.

53. A more participatory and value added engagement of non-governmental stakeholders, who mainly travel at their own cost, would enrich the sessions and increase their commitment to follow-up at the national level, thus enhancing the impact of the Commission's work. If included in national delegations, civil society and youth representatives would be able to add to the discussions as experts with lived experience. Additional opportunities for interaction between government representatives and other stakeholder groups during the session would create space for sharing views and expectations. Observer status at the informal meetings of

Member States would provide more opportunities for advocacy. Given ongoing concerns regarding trends in reported acts of intimidation and reprisals for cooperation with the United Nations in the field of human rights, including in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on online and in-person participation, and the need to enhance prevention and document alleged cases of intimidation and reprisals to improve policies and practices,³ the Commission's sessions could provide a good practice for ensuring that sessions promote the safe participation of all stakeholders, both online and in person, and that cases that may arise are documented, in line with the Secretary-General's Common Agenda, his Call to Action for Human Rights, the United Nations Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space and United Nations internal guidance on intimidation and reprisals for engagement with the United Nations, including in the digital space. Protecting and promoting civil society participation in the Commission's sessions enrich the discussion and would make for stronger and more impactful decisions.

Communications on the status of women

54. Prior to each session, a working group of the Commission consisting of five members meets to consider the list of confidential communications and the replies from Governments. The working group submits its report to the Commission, which considers it in a closed meeting. The number of communications received has increased over time, in particular in the past five years. In line with relevant resolutions, UN-Women has enhanced its website to increase the visibility of this procedure and provide more information thereon. This information explains who may submit a communication and how, while a chart outlines the procedure and timeline. UN-Women also publicizes the procedure on social media and disseminates information about deadlines by email to NGOs.

Interaction with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

55. Member States recognize that the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the fulfilment of the obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are mutually reinforcing in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The importance of the role of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has thus been recognized by the Economic and Social Council in its resolutions 2006/9 and 2015/6, in which it invited the Committee to contribute, where appropriate, to the discussion of the Commission. As a result, the Chair of the Committee addresses the Commission at its opening meeting or in the expert group meeting convened by UN-Women in preparation for the priority theme, as was the case in preparation for the 2020 session. In 2017, the Chair of the Committee took part in an interactive dialogue on accelerating the implementation of commitments for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. In 2018, a member of the Committee took part in the interactive expert panel on the role of rural women's land rights and land tenure security in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals.

56. Furthermore, the Commission has established a practice of scheduling a representative of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls to deliver an address in the general discussion and take part in relevant interactive dialogues.

³ See Human Rights Council resolution 48/17 and document A/HRC/48/28.

Regional commissions and other entities of the United Nations system

57. The regional commissions have continued to contribute to the work of the Commission, including by undertaking regional reviews during the five-year reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (see also Economic and Social Council resolution [2018/8](#)). The outcomes of intergovernmental processes at the regional level feed into the global reviews undertaken by the Commission.

IV. General Assembly resolutions [72/305](#), [75/290 A](#) and [75/325](#) and implications for the work of the Commission

58. General Assembly resolutions [72/305](#) and [75/290 A](#) have a direct impact on the methods of work of the functional commissions. The new working arrangements of the Economic and Social Council make provisions for focused contributions from its subsidiary bodies to its work, in keeping with the Council's agreed theme.

59. In its resolution [75/290 A](#), the General Assembly requested the subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council to further enhance their contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts. Subsidiary bodies should also contribute to the outcomes of other major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social, environmental and related fields and the response to major challenges to the achievement of sustainable development, while ensuring that they deliver on their specific mandates and functions. In this regard, the Assembly requested subsidiary bodies to decide on their own respective themes, aligned with the main theme of the Council, while continuing to address issues or a theme necessary to discharge their other functions. When selecting its priority themes, the Commission takes 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 and the 2030 Agenda. In that manner, the Commission builds synergies and contributes to the work of the Council system and the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

60. In its resolution [75/325](#), the General Assembly recognized the need to further align the agendas of the Assembly and its Main Committees and the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies with the 2030 Agenda, considering a comprehensive and holistic view of the agendas. The Assembly invited the subsidiary bodies of the Council to consider ways to address those Sustainable Development Goals that have limited or no coverage, and ways to avoid overlaps and duplication, and to strengthen synergies and complementarities in their respective work and outcomes when covering interrelated issues. The Commission has based its consideration of a multi-year programme of work on such analyses, most recently in Council resolution [2020/15](#), following the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report on proposals on the Commission's priority and review themes for 2021 and beyond ([E/CN.6/2020/4](#)).

61. In accordance with General Assembly resolution [72/305](#), subsidiary bodies should produce technical and expert analysis, assessments and policy recommendations to inform the integrated view of the Economic and Social Council and efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. They should reflect the need for an integrated and action-oriented approach to the Sustainable Development Goals in their work and build their recommendations on a solid evidence-based review of progress on the 2030 Agenda and of the outcomes of conferences and summits in their

respective area. In the agreed conclusions that it adopts as its main outcome, the Commission identifies gaps and challenges in the implementation of previous commitments and makes action-oriented recommendations to all States, relevant intergovernmental bodies, mechanisms and entities of the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders in order to accelerate their implementation.

V. Utilization of the year 2025

62. In accordance with its multi-year programme of work contained in Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/15, the Commission will consider and make a recommendation at its sixty-sixth session on how best to utilize the year 2025, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, so as to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and the full realization of their human rights. The Commission has conducted a 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 at five-year intervals, that is, in 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2020 (see Council resolutions 2001/4, 2009/15, 2013/18 and 2018/8).

VI. Recommendations

63. The Commission may wish to:

With regard to ways and means to further enhance the impact of the work of the Commission on the Status of Women

(a) Further enhance its catalytic role in support of gender mainstreaming, including cooperation with other functional commissions, through the exchange of information on programmes of work, joint informal panel discussions, the exchange of outcomes of sessions, and participation, through its Chair, in other intergovernmental processes; and expand the scope of transmittal of the outcomes of its work to relevant intergovernmental bodies and processes, and in this regard take into account the outcome of the forthcoming review of the subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council, as appropriate;

(b) Continue to use a multi-year thematic approach to its work and to ensure alignment with the annual theme of the Economic and Social Council and of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, when possible;

(c) Continue the current mandate under which the Secretary-General is requested to prepare an annual report on the priority theme;

(d) Continue to hold a general discussion, with a focus on the priority theme, to consolidate its role and its strategic value as the primary global forum for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment; and find creative solutions to increased participation by civil society speakers to deliver statements during the general discussion, such as interspersing their statements among those delivered by Member States;

(e) Maintain and further enhance the interactive nature of the consideration of its priority theme, with the participation of high-level representatives and of experts; and continue to work on improving the interactive quality of the dialogues and to create additional opportunities for civil society, young people and other stakeholders to share experiences and lessons learned on the priority theme, from a range of perspectives, and to strengthen commitment for further action;

(f) Reconfirm the need for the outcome on its priority theme to be short and succinct, and avoid the annual renegotiation of previously agreed language in order to enable a greater focus on the priority theme;

(g) Continue to evaluate progress in the implementation of previous agreed conclusions on the priority theme, through national voluntary presentations, and to consider ways to further strengthen accountability, monitoring and evaluation through that process; encourage the preparation of presentations at the national level through a multi-stakeholder consultation and that presentations, if possible, be made by a team of up to three speakers, led by a senior government official, and including representatives from civil society and other stakeholders addressed in the agreed conclusions; and maintain, as an outcome, a summary by the Chair of the Commission, prepared in consultation with the regional groups, through the members of the Bureau;

(h) Retain an item on emerging issues, trends, focus areas and new approaches to questions affecting the situation of women, including equality between women and men, that require timely consideration, to be selected prior to the session by its Bureau in consultation with Member States. In selecting a theme, the Commission may wish to bear in mind opportunities for contributing to, and strengthening coherence with, the thematic work of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum on sustainable development;

(i) Continue to engage with a wide range of stakeholders and expand such a group so as to leave no one behind, including through increased attention to accessibility, and in this regard consider including an interactive dialogue with young people in its annual programme of work to bring fresh perspectives, ideas and expectations for ending discrimination against women and girls everywhere;

(j) Continue the practice of allocating part of its session to a ministerial segment; and consider the option of a ministerial-level closing segment;

(k) Consider expanding opportunities for NGOs to contribute to its work through allocating more time to their interventions during the general discussion, according greater priority to their interventions during panel discussions and granting a limited number of regionally diverse representatives access to negotiations; and, building on the experience acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic, consider ways to enhance the safety, inclusiveness and accessibility of all participants to allow them to contribute both online and in person to the session, and to strengthen the global and diverse participation of NGOs;

(l) Continue its interaction with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women with regard to thematic issues on the Commission's programme of work, for example through panel discussions, and invite the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls to continue to contribute to its work;

(m) Encourage the regional commissions to continue to undertake regional reviews so that the outcomes of intergovernmental processes at the regional level can feed into the global reviews undertaken by the Commission;

(n) Reaffirm its commitment to contributing to the work of the Economic and Social Council from its substantive perspective and continue to serve as a catalyst for integrating a gender perspective in the work of the Council; continue to align its thematic priorities with those of the Council in order to provide effective and targeted inputs from a gender perspective; and encourage the Council to expand opportunities for discussion and interaction among the Council's subsidiary bodies on the gender perspectives of all dimensions of

sustainable development so as to strengthen gender mainstreaming in all areas of the global policy framework;

With regard to the utilization of the year 2025

(o) Undertake a 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, including an assessment of current challenges that affect the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women, and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda through a gender perspective;

(p) Call upon all States to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly; and encourage the regional commissions to undertake regional reviews so that the outcomes of intergovernmental processes at the regional level can feed into the 2025 review to be undertaken by the Commission at its sixty-ninth session;

(q) Encourage Governments to continue to support the role and contribution of civil society, in particular NGOs and women's organizations, as well as national human rights institutions, where they exist, in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and in this regard call upon Governments to collaborate with relevant stakeholders at all levels on preparations for the 2025 review so as to benefit from their experience and expertise.
