

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

WOMEN, THE GIRL CHILD AND HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS/ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME (HIV/AIDS)

CSW45 AGREED CONCLUSIONS (A)

United Nations, March 2001

WOMEN, THE GIRL CHILD AND HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS / ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME (HIV/AIDS)

1. Women play a vital role in the social and economic development of their countries. It is a profound concern that by the end of 2000, 36.1 million people were living with HIV/AIDS, and of those infected, 95 per cent were living in developing countries, and 16.4 million were women. The proportion of women infected with HIV is increasing and in sub-Saharan Africa women constitute 55 per cent of all adult HIV infected, while teenage girls are infected at a rate of five to six times greater than their male counterparts.
2. Full enjoyment by women and girls of all human rights, civil, cultural, economic, political and social, including the right to development — which are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated — is of crucial importance in preventing further spread of HIV/AIDS. The majority of women and girls do not fully enjoy their rights, in particular to education, the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and social security, especially in developing countries. These inequalities begin early in life and render women and girls more vulnerable in the area of sexual and reproductive health, thus increasing their risk and vulnerability to HIV infection and their disproportionate suffering from the consequences of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
3. Poverty, negative and harmful traditional and customary practices that subordinate women in the household, community and society render women especially vulnerable to HIV/STI. Millions of women and girls lack access and/or have insufficient access to health care, medication and social support in general, including in the case of sexually transmitted infections/HIV/AIDS.
4. The Commission on the Status of Women has taken into account the recommendations on women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS as addressed in the following documents: the Beijing Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Copenhagen Programme of Action, the outcome documents of the twenty-first, twenty-third and twenty-fourth special sessions of the General Assembly, the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the agreed conclusion of the Commission on the Status of Women on women and health, and Commission resolution 44/2.
5. The Commission recalls the internationally agreed targets as contained in the documents referred to in paragraph 4, and suggests that the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS should fully integrate a gender perspective, including in any new targets, and focus on actions needed to achieve existing targets.
6. The Commission welcomes the Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and other Related Infectious Diseases, in particular its gender dimension, adopted by the Organization of African Unity at its Special Summit on HIV/AIDS, held at Abuja, Nigeria, in April 2001.
7. The Commission notes with appreciation the efforts of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and its co-sponsors, bilateral and multilateral donors, governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in their efforts to empower women through capacity development programmes, as well as programmes that provide women with access to development resources and strengthen their networks that offer care and support to women affected by HIV/AIDS.
8. The highest level of political commitment to the empowerment and advancement of women and to the prevention, research, care and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, especially HIV/AIDS, must be secured.
9. It is important to fully integrate a gender perspective in the preparatory process and in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS, including, inter alia, the full integration of a gender perspective in any new targets and in actions needed to achieve internationally agreed targets that relate to women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS as contained in the documents referred to in paragraph 4 above.

10.

In order to accelerate the implementation of the strategic objectives of the conferences and documents mentioned in paragraph 4 above, especially of those objectives related to women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS, the Commission recommends that the following actions be taken:

Actions to be taken by Governments, the United Nations system and civil society, as appropriate

1. Empowerment of women

- (a) The rapid progression of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, particularly in the developing world, has had a devastating impact on women. The unequal power relationships between women and men, in which women often do not have the power to insist on safe and responsible sex practices, and lack of communication and understanding between women and men on women's health needs, inter alia, endanger women's health, particularly by increasing their susceptibility to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS;
- (b) Responsible behaviour and gender equality are among the important prerequisites for its prevention;
- (c) Ensure that the sexual health and reproductive rights of women of all ages as defined in paragraphs 94, 95 and 96 of the Beijing Platform for Action is seen as an essential part in efforts to promote women's empowerment, bearing in mind that women and girls are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS and in this context, further promote the advancement and empowerment of women and women's full enjoyment of all human rights, including the right to development and their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, in order to protect themselves from high risk and irresponsible behaviour leading to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS as well as access to health information and education, health care and health services which are critical to increasing the ability of women and young girls to protect themselves from HIV infection;
- (d) Focus national and international policies towards the eradication of poverty in order to empower women to better protect themselves from the spread of the pandemic and to more effectively deal with the adverse effects of HIV/AIDS;
- (e) Alleviate the social and economic impact of HIV/AIDS on women who in their roles as food suppliers and traditional caregivers are primarily affected by the negative consequences of the pandemic, such as a reduced labour force and a breakdown of social service systems;
- (f) Reaffirm the equal rights of women and the girl child infected and affected by sexually transmitted infections/HIV/AIDS to have access to health, education and social services and to be protected from all forms of discrimination, stigma, abuse and neglect;
- (g) Also reaffirm the human rights of girls and women to equal access to education, skill training and employment opportunities as a means to reduce their vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases/HIV;
- (h) Urge Governments to take all necessary measures to empower women and strengthen women's economic independence and protect and promote full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in order to allow women and girls to better protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections/HIV;
- (i) Address and reduce the increased HIV/AIDS risks, vulnerabilities and impact on women and girls, including in conflict situations, through gender-sensitive economic, legal and social services and programmes, including integration of HIV/AIDS prevention and care services into minimum essential health-care packages;
- (j) Strengthen concrete measures to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, including harmful traditional and customary practices, abuse and rape, battering and trafficking in women and girls, which aggravate the conditions fostering the spread

of HIV/AIDS, through, inter alia, the enactment and enforcement of laws, as well as public campaigns to combat violence against women and girls;

- (k) Take steps to create an environment that promotes all human rights, compassion and support for people infected/affected by HIV/AIDS, including through introducing and/or reviewing legislation with a view to striving to remove discriminatory provisions and provide the legal framework that will protect the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS, particularly of women and girls, and enable those who are vulnerable to have access to appropriate voluntary and confidential counselling services, and encourage efforts to reduce discrimination and stigmatization;
- (l) Further develop and fully integrate a gender perspective into national regional and international HIV/AIDS programmes and strategies, taking into account, inter alia, sex and age disaggregated data and statistics, with a particular focus on gender equality;
- (m) Take measures to promote and implement women's equal access to and control over economic resources, including land, property rights, the right to inheritance, regardless of their marital status, in order to reduce the vulnerability of women in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic;
- (n) Provide women and girls, including those in marginalized groups, with equal access to quality education, literacy programmes, health care and health services, social services, skills training and employment opportunities, support capacity-building and the strengthening of women's networks and protect them from all forms of discrimination, including racial discrimination, stigma, abuse and neglect, in order to reduce their risk and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and alleviate the impact on those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

2. Prevention

- (a) Governments, relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, individually and collectively, should make efforts to place combating HIV/AIDS as a priority on the development agenda and to implement multisectoral and decentralized effective

preventive strategies and programmes, especially for the most vulnerable populations, including women, young girls and infants, also taking into account the prevention of mother-to-child transmission;

- (b) Governments, with the assistance of relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, must adopt a long-term, timely, coherent and integrated AIDS prevention policy, with public information, life skills-based education programmes specifically tailored to the needs of women and girls adapted to their social cultural context and sensitivities and the specific needs in their life cycle;
- (c) Intensify efforts to determine the best policies and programmes to prevent women and young girls from becoming infected with HIV/AIDS, taking into account that women, in particular young girls, are socially, physiologically and biologically more vulnerable than men to sexually transmitted infections;
- (d) Take measures to integrate, inter alia, a family-based approach in programmes aiming at providing prevention, care and support to women and girls infected and affected by HIV/AIDS; as well as take measures to integrate a community-based approach in policies and programmes aimed at providing prevention, care and support to women and girls infected and affected by HIV/AIDS;
- (e) Ensure equal and non-discriminatory access to accurate, comprehensive information, to prevention education on reproductive health, and to voluntary testing and counselling services and technologies within a cultural and gender-sensitive framework and with particular emphasis on adolescents and young adults;
- (f) Request the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and its co-sponsors to continue in their efforts aimed at providing complete and accurate sexual and reproductive health education for young people, within a cultural and gender-sensitive framework, while, inter alia, encouraging them to delay sexual initiation, or/and to use condoms and, in this context, urge that greater attention be given to the education of men and boys about their roles and their responsibilities in preventing the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, to their partners;

- (g) Promote gender equality in relationships, and provide information and resources to promote informed, responsible and safe sexual behaviour and practices, mutual respect and gender equality in sexual relationships;
- (h) Encourage all forms of media to promote non-discriminatory and gender-sensitive images and a culture of non-violence and respect for all human rights, and particularly women's rights, in addressing HIV/AIDS;
- (i) Encourage active involvement of men and boys through, inter alia, youth-led and youth-specific HIV education projects and peer-based programmes, in challenging gender stereotypes and attitudes as well as gender inequalities in relation to HIV and AIDS, as well as their full participation in prevention, impact alleviation and care, and design and implement programmes to encourage and enable men to adopt safe and responsible sexual and reproductive behaviour and to use effectively methods to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS;
- (j) Intensify, especially in the most affected countries, education, services, community-based mobilization and information strategies to protect women of all ages from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, including through the development of safe, affordable, effective and easily accessible female-controlled methods, including such methods as microbicides and female condoms that protect against sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, as well as voluntary and confidential HIV testing and counselling and the promotion of sexually responsible behaviour, including abstinence and condom use;
- (k) Strengthen sustainable, efficient and accessible primary health-care systems that serve to support prevention efforts;
- (l) Special attention should be given to the prevention of HIV, particularly with regard to mother-to-child transmission and for victims of rape — on the basis of informed consent and voluntary and confidential testing, counselling and treatment — including through ensuring access to care and improving the quality and availability of affordable drugs and

diagnostics, especially antiretroviral therapies, and by building on existing efforts, with special attention given to the issue of breastfeeding;

- (m) Strive to ensure that schools at all levels, other education institutions and non-formal systems of education play a leading role in preventing HIV infection, preventing and combating stigmatization and discrimination through the provision of an environment free of all forms of violence that promotes compassion and tolerance, and provide gender-sensitive education, including on responsible sexual behaviour, and practices, life skills and behaviour change;
- (n) Work together with civil society, including traditional, community and religious leaders to identify the customary and traditional practices that adversely influence gender relations, and to eliminate those practices that increase the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS.

3. Treatment, care and support

- (a) Request Governments to ensure universal and equal access for women and men throughout their life cycle to social services related to health care, including education, clean water and safe sanitation, nutrition, food security and health education programmes, especially for women and girls living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, including treatment for opportunistic diseases;
- (b) Request Governments to work to provide comprehensive health care for women and girls living with HIV/AIDS, including dietary and food supplements and treatment for opportunistic infections and full, equal, non-discriminatory and prompt access to health care and health services, including sexual and reproductive health, voluntary and confidential counselling, taking into account the rights of the child to access to information, privacy, confidentiality, respect and informed consent and the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents and legal guardians;
- (c) Care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS, particularly women and girls, should have a comprehensive approach involving medical, social, psychological, spiritual and economic needs, targeting the community and national levels;

- (d) Collaborate to strengthen efforts to create an environment and the conditions necessary, with the assistance of relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations upon request, to address the challenges faced by women and girls infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, particularly orphans and widows, girls and older women who may also be primary caregivers for people living with HIV/AIDS, all of whom are particularly vulnerable to both economic and sexual exploitation; provide them with the necessary economic and psycho-social support and encourage their economic independence through income-generating programmes and other methods;
- (e) Provide support for the implementation of special programmes for the growing problems of children orphaned by AIDS, especially girls who may easily become victims of sexual exploitation;

4. Enabling environment for regional and international cooperation

- (a) Call upon the international community, relevant agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to intensify their support of national efforts against HIV/AIDS, particularly in favour of women and young girls, including efforts at providing affordable antiretroviral drugs, diagnostics and drugs to treat tuberculosis and other opportunistic infections; strengthening health systems, including reliable distribution and delivery systems; implementing a strong generic drug policy; bulk purchasing; negotiating with pharmaceutical companies to reduce prices; appropriate financing systems; and encouraging local manufacturing and import practices consistent with national laws and international agreements, and particularly in the worst hit regions in Africa and where the epidemic is severely setting back national development gains;
- (b) Take action to eradicate poverty, which is a major contributory factor for the spread of HIV infection and worsens the impact of the epidemic, particularly for women and girls, as well as depleting resources and incomes of families and endangering the survival of present and future generations;
- (c) Identify and implement development-oriented and durable solutions that integrate a gender perspective to external debt and debt-servicing problems of developing countries, including least developed countries, inter alia, through debt relief, including the option of debt cancellation for official development assistance in order to help them to finance programmes and projects targeted at development, including the advancement of women, inter alia, through facilitating the delivery of health care and health services and the provision of preventive programmes on HIV/AIDS, especially targeting women and girls; and in this regard, welcome the Cologne initiative for the reduction of debt, particularly the speedy implementation of the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiatives; and encourages Governments to ensure the provision of adequate funds for its implementation and implement the provision that funds saved should be used to support anti-poverty programmes that are gender sensitive and that address prevention, care and support of women and girls infected and affected;
- (d) Ensure international, regional and South-South cooperation, including development assistance and additional adequate resources to implement gender-sensitive policies and programmes aimed at halting the spread of the epidemic in providing affordable quality treatment and care of all people, especially women and girls living with HIV/AIDS;
- (e) Encourage the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and its co-sponsors, bilateral and multi-lateral donors and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to intensify their support to empower women and prevent HIV infection, to give urgent and priority attention to the situation of women and girls, especially in Africa, in particular through the International Partnership against AIDS in Africa;
- (f) Increase investment in research on the development of HIV vaccines, microbicides and other female controlled methods, simpler and less expensive diagnostic tests, single-dose treatments for sexually transmitted infections and quality low-cost drug combinations, including for opportunistic infections and sexually transmitted infections, as well as alternative medicine for HIV/AIDS, focusing on the needs of women and girls;

- (g) Support and assist research and development centres, in particular at the national level, in the worst-hit regions with a gender specific focus, in the field of vaccines and treatment for HIV/AIDS, as well as support the efforts by Governments in building and/or strengthening their national capacities in this area;
- (h) Develop and implement as well as strengthen already existing training programmes for law enforcement officers, prison officers, medical officers and judicial personnel, as well as United Nations personnel, including peacekeeping staff, to be more sensitive and responsive to the needs of threatened and abused women and children infected with HIV/AIDS, including intravenous drug users, female inmates and orphans;
- (i) Ensure that the needs of girls and women in relation to HIV/AIDS in all situations of conflict, post-conflict and peacekeeping and in the immediate and reconstructive responses to emergencies and natural disasters are addressed;
- (j) Provide gender sensitive prevention and treatment services for female substance abusers living with HIV/AIDS;
- (k) Provide technical and financial support to networks of people living with HIV/AIDS, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations involved in implementing HIV/AIDS programmes, particularly women's groups, in order to strengthen their efforts;
- (l) Adopt a balanced approach to prevention and comprehensive care, including treatment and support, for women and girls affected by HIV/AIDS, taking into account the role played by poverty, poor nutritional conditions and underdevelopment, which increases the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS;
- (m) Urge relevant United Nations entities to incorporate a gender perspective into their follow-up and evaluation of the progress made on the control of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS;
- (n) Commend UNAIDS for its advocacy in successfully accelerating both increased prevention and improved access to care, urge Governments and the international community to continue advocating, lobbying and encourage Governments to enter into negotiations with multinational drug companies for reduction in market prices of HIV/AIDS related drugs and diagnostics to ensure availability, affordability and sustainability to women and girls living with HIV/AIDS. ■

Source: United Nations document E/2001/27