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## REPORT ON THE 56<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

6 June 2012

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. It is the principal global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women. Representatives of Member States gather annually at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards and formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide.

The fifty-sixth session (56<sup>th</sup> CSW Session) of the CSW was held from the 27<sup>th</sup> February to the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2012. Discussions during the 56<sup>th</sup> CSW Session were centred on the priority theme of the session, namely, "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges". In addition to the priority theme, the 56<sup>th</sup> CSW Session had a review theme, "Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women" emanating from the agreed conclusions from the fifty-second session. Other key themes under discussion included "Engaging young women and men, girls and boys, to advance gender equality" and the "Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls". The latter theme constituted the basis for discussion of the priority theme for the 57<sup>th</sup> CSW session in 2013.

\* A Report on the 56<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women was produced and agreed to by the Parliamentary delegation that attended the CSW Session namely; Ms DR Ramodibe, Ms PB Mabe and Ms B Dlulane. Hereafter the report was sent to Mrs F Hajaig. She, in her capacity as the House Chairperson responsible for the Parliamentary Group on International Relations, subsequently referred the report to the Portfolio Committee on Women, Children and People with Disabilities for consideration and reporting. To this end, the Portfolio Committee on Women, Children and People with Disabilities discussed and adopted the report on 12 September 2012.

In summary, this report identifies the key issues that emerged from discussions held during the 56<sup>th</sup> CSW Session in relation to the aforementioned themes. Moreover, the Inter-Parliamentary Union had also invited Parliamentarians attending CSW to side-events the outcomes of which are also discussed in this report. The report concludes with an overview of the Resolutions adopted and the implications of these Resolutions for the Parliament of South Africa (Parliament).



## 2. THEMATIC AREAS

The thematic areas outlined below were identified based on key issues that emerged at the 56<sup>th</sup> CSW Session. What follows is a description of each based on the discussions held within the sessions and the implications of the concerned thematic area for Parliament.

### **2.1 Empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges**

It was widely acknowledged that rural women and girls continue to suffer from discrimination at various levels. The key challenges in this regard are poverty, gender-based violence (GBV), gender stereotypes, trafficking, effects of climate change, lack of decision making impact on gender equality and the impact of the global financial crisis particularly on women and girls who are disabled. Other challenges in this regard include escalating food prices, lack of access to basic services and restricted access to markets all impact negatively on rural women and their ability to access the formal economy. The global financial crisis has had a negative impact on the livelihoods of rural women and girls particularly those with disabilities who are regarded as the poorest of the poor within impoverished communities.

Rural women are extremely diverse however they face multiple forms of discrimination (e.g. trafficking, HIV/AIDS, migration, disability) and therefore policies need to address these anomalies. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that the needs of rural women are unique depending on their situation and therefore they should not be categorised solely into one group or generalised as this takes away from the unique challenges they face. In keeping with discussions around specific groups of rural women currently experiencing a duplicity of challenges, the plight of Arab women (e.g. Palestinian, Syrian) in countries engulfed by armed conflict was also brought to the attention by several speakers. Discussions also revealed that there was an overall lack information on data and status of rural women, or data that is incomplete or out-dated, therefore reflect invisibility of women's needs and challenges making it even harder to illustrate the diverse challenges in a quantitative manner.

Based on the various high level discussions and as well as plenary events, several recommendations were made as to how to advance the empowerment of rural women and girls.

Food security for rural women and girls was noted as a key driver for ending hunger and poverty. Moreover it was reiterated that rural women are major contributors to food production and thus should be taken into consideration and consulted when dealing with matters related to food security. This required creating an enabling environment in order to facilitate sustainable development.



Improving the educational system and levels of education by ensuring effective participation and access for rural women and young girls was identified as being key to breaking the poverty cycle and facilitating empowerment.

Access to sexual and reproductive health care and basic health care services are essential for addressing maternal mortality and in so doing achieving Millennium Development Goal which concerns the improvement of maternal health (MDG 5). Similarly, preventing forced marriage and teenage pregnancies all impact on MDG 5 and alleviate poverty. Thus sexual and reproductive health rights (including family planning) must be addressed as these impact on the health and wellbeing of women and girls in rural areas who have limited and at times no access to basic health care services.

The importance of decision making at various levels and managing projects that include rural women were recognised as vital for the empowerment of rural women to be facilitated. This coincided with the call for an increased representation of women in public offices and in turn required local projects and strategies to be prioritised in order to mobilise resources. In addition, exchange of information regarding access to resources, technology and the like as well as the establishment of networks were determined to be beneficial to rural women.

The discussants reiterated that rural women and girls can only be empowered by advancing their economic and social status. This can be achieved through various means such as access to credit, resources and land; improved access to markets for women in agriculture; greater investment in agriculture; ensuring access to machinery and equipment; improved leadership and institutional capacity building hereto; a need for more specific projects and programmes in rural areas; developing Information and Communication Technology (ICT); establishing co-operatives; and investment by Governments in rural women's organisations to ensure prosperity in rural areas. It was also stated that rural women's organisations also have a valuable role in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). All of the aforementioned are essential for the development of rural women and advancing their means of production.

Of particular importance, it was also stated that an urgent need exists to obtain empirical data to inform policy and advocacy in light of the multiple forms of discrimination faced by rural women and of the fact that they cannot be categorised as a homogenous group and accordingly policies are needed to address these anomalies. Discussants also pointed out, with regard to the existing and new legislation, that there was a need to consult rural woman on matters that affect their lives for example laws pertaining to land acquisition and inheritance.

## **2.2 Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women**

Despite commitments such as Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which outline specific obligations for Member States to meet in eliminating discrimination against women in rural areas, Governments and many other



stakeholders have been slow in responding effectively to the needs and priorities of rural women.

Further in terms of this theme, discussants established that an enabling policy environment for rural women's economic empowerment needs to be created as a matter of urgency, by placing their concerns in the mainstream economic agenda, in particular in the areas of agriculture, finance and national planning. Addressing the needs and concerns of rural women in all policies at all levels requires a dual-track strategy which includes a stronger focus on gender mainstreaming across the board, and targeted measures that respond to the diversity of rural women, in all parts of the world. It also requires a holistic approach that addresses all dimensions of empowerment, including economic, political and social empowerment.

Urban migration, financial and economic crises, volatile food prices, climate change, coastal erosion, landslides and hurricanes pose particular challenges for people living in rural areas. To this end comprehensive rural development policies that are integrated with sectoral policies are needed to address the aforementioned challenges in a coherent manner which is essential for ensuring the sustainable development of rural areas. It was also stated that gender equality and women's empowerment was a prerequisite for achieving all of the MDGs. In so doing rural women had a vital role to play at different levels of agricultural production, rural development and food and nutrition security. However it was broadly acknowledged that rural women continue to have limited access to economic opportunities, resources, assets, public services, social protection, infrastructure, transport, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

All speakers acknowledged that there was a need for gender responsive budgeting to advance the empowerment of rural women. Specific input received on women farmers by speakers and delegates revealed that these farmers had limited access to markets, agricultural extension services and the most basic agricultural inputs, such as seeds and tools. What was also highlighted was that rural women rely heavily on microfinance because of lack of access to land which is due to a myriad of reasons such as women's inability to land tenure due to patriarchal laws and cultural practices, discriminatory inheritance laws, customary laws, and traditional norms and practices that either hinder or deny women from acquiring land. Therefore gender inequality in access to land persists and ensuring women's right to land is vital for rural women's economic empowerment. It further emerged that micro-credit has its limitations and as such there is a need for a broader range of strategies for securing finances for rural women (such as savings) as well as non-financial support (such as business planning). Thus it was imperative to understand the financial needs of women living in rural areas.

Overall there is a broader need to strengthen rural financial services as rural people have greater difficulty accessing financial and banking institutions which are mostly situated in cities. As such people living in rural areas requiring financial assistance would need to commute to where banks and financial institutions are located. For women, needing to



access such financial services the challenges are further exacerbated by the multiplicity of roles which impact on their time to be able to travel to these financial institutions. However, even when trying to access finance, rural women are further disadvantaged by the fact that may not necessarily have collateral as proof to ensure that they would be good creditors. Moreover, rural women, however, need access not only to microcredit, but also to savings and other financial services such as internet banking. It was thus reaffirmed that support should be provided to building systems and institutions that can deliver the range of financial services required by rural women. Insurance for securing women's land, equipment, machinery and produce was another issue that was raised as it was often overlooked or given insufficient attention to the detriment of rural women who rely heavily on micro-finance and have difficulty accessing credit. As such loss on account of theft or natural disaster would have a detrimental effect on produce yielded and in turn negatively impact on household income.

It was however made clear that having access to credit is not sufficient for rural women's economic empowerment and that both formal and non-formal education are necessary foundations for rural women to overcome social barriers, utilise information and communications technologies, interact with the formal banking system, enhance their business skills and increase their productivity, claim their rights, and access resources. Thus rural women need training in financial literacy to be able to use credit in the most effective way, improve their self-esteem, learn how markets operate and become familiar with price-setting and product distribution. Special emphasis should also be placed on imparting knowledge about the benefits of savings for future investment.

Closely linked is the availability of ICT infrastructure in rural areas. Access to the internet, electronic mail and facsimiles are but some of the essential mediums through which financial institutions have come to communicate with their clients. Therefore people living in rural areas who lack the skills to utilise modern day ICT and/or are unable to access such mediums because of lack or limited availability are further disadvantaged in this regard in a number of respects. Firstly there is a limited exposure to information on where and how to access financial aid on the internet for persons living in rural areas with no access to ICT. Secondly, for those who received financial aid are limited to communication through the post and or telephone or actual site visits all of which are expensive and are time consuming. Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that literacy rates for rural women and girls are even lower thus placing them at a further disadvantage. Best practice examples were shared that demonstrated how many countries have put in place programmes to further develop women's and girls' capacities, knowledge and skills related to financial management and savings as well as the use and management of new technologies, in particular information and communications technologies and renewable energy technologies. Creative interventions, such as distance learning programmes, have demonstrated the importance of taking into account the various constraints rural women face in accessing education proved to be very helpful for women in rural areas. This was illustrated by the "boarding centres" in the Middle East and North Africa, whereby secure spaces were created for bringing together and training rural women with limited mobility.



Discussions revealed a number of issues that would need to be addressed in terms of financing for gender equality. It was clearly stated that women's economic empowerment cannot be looked at in isolation of their rights. Besides improving access to financial aid, there was a pressing need to obtain empirical data to inform policy and advocacy. Strategies must be developed to protect women in rural areas. Closely linked to this is the need to address the gender gap in training, education, technology. This could be achieved by opening up avenues for coalitions include NGO's to raise issues via various platforms and provide input into policy. In order for this to happen, women in rural areas must have the opportunities to provide input into programmes that affect their lives including legislation to right to protect land. Education is fundamental for women and girls in rural areas. Skills development and mentoring is business planning and financial management was key. But so too were goals related to promoting health and nutrition of rural women that are impacted in by the HIV AIDS pandemic. Working to change patriarchal-attitudes was imperative.

A key gap identified was that even though there indicators for tracking gender equality funding and gender-responsive financing, these did not necessarily measure gender equality results or the impacts and outcomes of programmes and projects. Therefore the requisite tools that can effectively measure the quality and impact of development assistance, including evaluations, audits and reviews, were lacking. Furthermore it was also stated that frameworks and standards established to monitor performance rarely integrated gender-sensitive indicators. It was also argued that the reporting, monitoring and tracking systems adopted by bilateral and multilateral donors and by United Nations entities remained largely isolated from national systems, thereby increasing the burden on reporting by recipients.

Whilst there have been advances in the inclusion of gender equality advocates in financing decisions, more still needs to be done to meet the recommendations from the agreed conclusions regarding the participation of women in decision-making related to financing. Herewith some of the recommendations that emerged during discussion to accelerate implementation:

- Critically examine current macroeconomic frameworks and policies and adopt policies that expand fiscal space to ensure adequate financing for gender equality;
- Explore innovative approaches to financing for gender equality such as taxation on financial transactions or public-private partnerships that are balanced and centred on gender equality goals;
- Increase investment in gender equality and broaden the scope of support to gender equality beyond social sectors to include the economic and productive sectors;
- Work to harmonize the existing tracking systems of international organizations and multilateral and bilateral donors to reduce the burden of monitoring and reporting on recipient Governments and civil society organizations;
- Strengthen and ensure the analysis and use of data generated through tracking and monitoring systems, and improve their accessibility so as to inform and influence



decisions at strategic and policy levels and shape programmes and projects at a practical level;

- Ensure that aid management instruments and processes and joint aid coordination mechanisms adequately reflect and address gender equality priorities;
- Strengthen the support from the United Nations system and multilateral and other actors for national efforts to implement gender-responsive budgeting approaches, especially in the context of public sector reform;
- Set measurable targets for financing for gender equality as a share of official development assistance;
- Invest in the development and use of tools to assess the impact and results achieved in gender equality through support provided by United Nations programmes and multilateral support;
- Ensure funding for UN-Women to enable it to fulfil its mandate effectively;
- Accelerate efforts towards the adoption of a United Nations system-wide marker for tracking budget allocations and expenditures to promote gender equality;
- Strengthen and expand support for women's organisations, especially by a commitment to sustainable funding;
- Put in place special provisions to ensure that small grass-roots organizations and organizations that work with marginalized groups of women have access to resources, such as small-grants windows, quotas or "re-granting" mechanisms.
- Women should be on mainstream agenda of global economies.
- Supporting the establishment of cooperative groups
- All rights should be looked at in a holistic manner therefor mainstreaming gender equality into all programmes of Government and national agendas
- Women's economic empowerment cannot dissociated from education. For instance Iran has boarding centres for training for rural women to stay for long period (15-20 days) better than commuting.
- Social barriers hindering women's economic empowerment.
- Formal and informal education for rural women to access e.g. literacy skills, business skills, rural ICD services should be addressed as a matter of urgency
- Need for comprehensive rural development policies – co-ordinating policies to ensure coherence between other sectoral policies.

### **2.3 Engaging young women and men, girls and boys, to advance gender equality**

The empowerment of women and girls was a cross-cutting theme which emerged in relation to most issues discussed at the 56<sup>th</sup> CSW Session. It was agreed that women's empowerment must be addressed in a holistic manner. A multi-pronged approach is required to address the needs of rural women. There was also a call for increased representation of women in public offices access to women's rights to basic services and legal rights; political representation and decision making. A common goal for ensuring women's empowerment was the introduction of quota systems (for example 25% representation requirement in terms of decision-making bodies and leadership). Notwithstanding, the importance of addressing gender parity, it was also stressed that the gender responsive policies should be



implemented. Delegates further noted a key means of empowering women was to ensure that women are included in oversight and accountability matters.

The South Africa representative of Government also shared best practice examples of how far the country had come in advancing gender equality through legislative and policy development. In the President of South Africa's 2012 State of the Nation Address a commitment was also made to create 4.5 million jobs and the assurance was that there would be focussed efforts targeting women in this regard.

It was imperative to develop evidence based research relating to the participation of rural women to gain insight into what would facilitate empowerment processes and programmes. Women entrepreneurs in rural areas should be supported. This can be achieved by linking women to accessible credit; microfinance institutions; to private sector finance; developing women's financial skills, information and business service development. Central to all of this is integrating gender sensitivity into financing models. Infrastructural development and local marketing should also be promoted alongside building on women's capacity to be able to access these markets. Developing transport systems to promote local employment and marketing in rural areas is also crucial. Best practice examples were cited by various countries such as Italy that produced guidelines on gender equality regarding rural development. By contrast there were also many countries (perhaps you should give examples of these countries) that were challenged with how best to mainstream gender in rural development particularly in policies.

Dedicated strategies were required to address gender equality. At a regional level, structures have been created to deal with gender equality for example the African Union (AU) had developed a gender management system as part of structure to determine policies on gender in the AU. Besides internal structural and systemic developments, the importance of regional integration was seen as a key driver to promote economic growth. The European Union (EU) has a treaty and charter reinforces gender equality attainment.

The discussion concluded with the re-emphasising the importance of the MDGs in relation to the theme for the 56<sup>th</sup> session and reinforcing the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Generally the reform in institutions is essential in term of laws, policies and programmes but it was acknowledged that a change in household management to free up women's time to utilise opportunities was also required. Patriarchal attitudes, cultural and or religious norms and values may pose a restriction on the movement of women and girls thereby preventing their access to opportunities for self-development and empowerment.

A call was also made for constitutional reform for ensuring rights of women to ensure political and social participation of women more so in new emerging democracies. It was also stated that meaningful participation in decision making along with an enabling policy environment can advance rural women. Hence opening up avenues for coalitions that include women's





non-governmental organisations (NGO's) to raise issues via various platforms is essential and provides opportunities to give input into policy as part of a collective.

## **2.4 Gender-Based Violence**

GBV continues to be a key challenge facing many women and young girls worldwide. Several issues in relation to gender-based violence were discussed and are highlighted below. Violence against women has been prioritised at a global, regional and national level. To this end, many States have strengthened and adopted comprehensive legal, policy and institutional frameworks to end violence against women and girls. So too have support services become increasingly available to victims of domestic violence. Notwithstanding, the progress made in terms of legislative frameworks that have been developed and services created for victims of domestic violence, women and girls continue to be subjected to the worst forms of atrocities as evident in sexual violence perpetrated during wars. The experience of Rwandan civil war was testament to gender based violence used as an act of war, for example, women raped by men who had AIDS. A severe outcome of this is the next generation of orphans post genocide and the burden of care imposed on caregivers and the state. Impunity for perpetrators, inadequate services for victims violence, attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate negative stereotypes and violence against women and girls along with lack of resources for implementing measures to protect women and girls continue to pose as barriers that hinder the protection of women and girls.

It was also noted that violence plays a crucial role in increasing women and girls' vulnerability to contracting HIV/AIDS and violence against women and girls represent two of the greatest dangers to their health and well-being. Hence more emphasis needs to be placed on developing and implementing integrated approaches to dealing with these intersections. Key to this was the importance of applying gender-sensitive approaches to the dual pandemics. It was highlighted that domestic trafficking was not always about moving across borders but occurred within a city or a region. Delegates stated that mechanisms must be in place to address security barriers to addressing trafficking because of the criminal element namely organised crime syndicates. Moreover, the psychosocial needs of persons who are trafficked must be tendered to. As such there exists a need for protocols to be developed that focus on shelters for trafficked persons. Further, emphasis was placed on enhancing prevention modalities, that is, programmes that focus more on the promotion of women's rights and the prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. Thus programmes should not only concentrate on working with survivors of rights violations once the incident had already occurred. Instead programmes should also focus on the empowerment of women and girls as well as men and boys. To this end, Members of Parliament have a role to play in this regard and as such must live by example by being aware of how are they are treating and rearing the boy and girl child.

The discussion on sexual and reproductive health rights was located within the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. A clear intersection also exists between HIV/AIDS, sexual reproductive health and GBV. Delegates noted that myths in relation to sexual reproductive health and the



HIV/AIDS pandemics still need to be dealt with. Despite the negative outcomes of dealing with this issue, it was indicated that it is important to deal with positive aspects of sexual and reproductive health rights and there was a need to educate women and men in this regard. This in turn necessitates the recognition of value and religious beliefs. Parents and caregivers were noted as having to play a vital role in educating children about sexuality. The role of the media and information communication technology was also discussed as an important avenue for relaying sex education. However such mechanisms are also open to abuse for example the distribution of images of child abuse. The dangers of interactive chat rooms were also discussed in light of children's increases access to information technology. These interactive cyber chat rooms can be abused for purposes that violate the rights of children. Thus children should be taught about the dangers in this regard.

In terms of ending violence against women, it was highlighted that the root causes of violence should be addressed. A lack of access to opportunities within the context of poverty were factors that had to be addressed as part of a comprehensive strategy for dealing with gender based violence. Termination of pregnancies must be linked to access to funds as the availability of such a service should not disadvantage poor women from accessing such services. Thus the implementation of laws that legalise the termination of pregnancy will safeguard against accessing services for unsafe abortions. However, the inter-relation of sexual reproductive health rights in relation to cultural and religious rights of particular states was also acknowledged.

### **3. INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION**

During the 56<sup>th</sup> CSW Session the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), focussed on the theme *Empowering rural women: what role for parliaments?* Discussions under this theme focussed on strategies to empower rural women.

#### **3.1 Women in Politics**

The IPU hosted the event with UN Women in order to provide a forum for debate between parliamentarians from all over the world, and to contribute to the deliberations of the 56th CSW Session. The session focussed on the challenges as well as the mechanisms for ensuring that rural women are fully part of the political process and that their voices are heard and taken into account by parliaments. The discussions highlighted actions parliaments can take and took to overcome barriers and advance the status of rural women that were shared by several parliamentarians during the plenary discussions. It was widely agreed that Parliaments must incorporate gender issues in their work and the support by UN Women is essential. Parliaments were said to have a vital role to in the emancipation of rural women. To this end, the role of women is multifaceted and must be linked to a holistic approach to facilitate the empowerment of rural women. Based on the experiences of parliamentarians, it was noted that there were several barriers to women's emancipation in rural areas as these women were more harshly affected by poverty and literacy and further



had limited access to health care, justice and basic services. In addition, the development of infrastructure for women in rural areas was also noted as important. The challenges faced by rural girls such as teenage pregnancies, forced marriages, lack of access to education were also highlighted as requiring astute oversight by parliamentarians.

In terms of the role that parliaments can play to advance gender equality, these included amongst others legislative developments through a gender lense; ensuring the mainstreaming of gender within budgets; and strengthening political participation of women through quotas to address gender parity. Practically speaking, in terms of the role that female parliamentarians can play in relation to empowering rural women, it was stated that parliamentarians must ensure that rural women have access to infrastructure, finance, build capacity to promote leadership of rural women. In cases where legislation does not promote gender equality, it was noted that there was a need to review and amend these policies and legislation accordingly. Closely linked to this was the importance of awareness programmes to highlight the rights of women. All these measures require stringent oversight by parliamentarians which can be attained by holding services providers accountable – democracy in action. Delegates were also urged to implement the CSW Resolutions and at a country level.

A member of the South African delegation had shared the experiences of the South African Parliament in advancing female representation in Parliament. To this end, it was stated that South Africa is committed to the equality and empowerment of women in all spheres of private and public life and expresses its commitment in this regard in the Constitution which actively makes provision for equality for all and provides a framework for the pursuing of equality and human rights. By facilitating women's equal involvement in all decision-making processes in the country, the South Africa Constitution also extends and ensures women's political equality, thus creating an enabling environment for the achievement of gender equality. The South African Government has also passed numerous pieces of legislation to promote gender equality, protect the rights of women and enhance the gender agenda. A report on the representation of women in the 2009 South African elections indicates that South Africa has moved up from 17th to 3rd position in the world rankings of women in Parliament. This is the largest increase since the 1994 elections. Post the 2009 elections, women constituted only 40% of Ministers and 39% of Deputy Ministers. The increase in the number of women parliamentarians highlights the positive firstly impact that women's improved political access has had and secondly the value of adopting quotas for women by some political parties have had.

### 3.2 ICT

It was acknowledged that ICT have become essential in supporting the work of legislative bodies throughout the world. Moreover, ICT assists legislatures in their most important responsibilities namely in terms of legislative development; in conducting oversight of the executive as it carries out its mandates; and by communicating with the citizens. Therefore access to reliable, timely information is essential to the proper functioning of democratic



legislatures. Discussions revealed that parliamentarians need information because they not only monitor issues but they also develop policy solutions, predict consequences, and influence government decision making. In their role of overseeing the executive, parliamentarians need information in order to monitor the success of on-going programs and to identify areas of weakness. Thus in order to achieve this, it is imperative the Parliament capitalize on the benefits of ICT to function effectively, to interact with the public, and to collaborate with other parliaments around the world. It was also argued that ICT's are cost saving mechanisms and enable parliaments to apply technology through virtual mobility. Moreover, best practice examples were shared about how women utilise ICT to effectively engage with their constituents be it through social network media such as Facebook and Twitter to blogs and emails. The aforementioned social networks were also utilised to disseminate information and keep civil society abreast of developments within Parliament. A key challenge noted by parliamentarians was the time it takes to manage the responses and respond accordingly all of which require sufficient financial and human resources.

A member of the South African delegation also shared with delegates best practice from the South African Parliament which included the following:

- Electronic voting for Members;
- Electronic mediums within Committee rooms;
- All Members have laptops and have access to broad band technologies (internet access, individual email accounts);
- All members have access to pre-programmed documents related to the daily proceedings of Parliament;
- Parliament also has voice recognition software/digital recordings to record proceedings in Parliament;
- All provinces have Parliamentary Democracy Offices (PDO) with the aim of providing information to citizens from Parliament. PDO's are also connected using video-conferencing facilities;
- South African Parliament's Content Management System was developed to manage information and preserve institutional memory. Moreover, it enables users to monitor the progress of tasks involving documentation and setting deadlines with reminder facilities.
- In terms of acquisition and utilisation of evidence based research, each Parliamentary Committee is supported by specialist researchers. In so doing Members of Parliament are able to meet their mandate in becoming accessible and responsive public representatives.
- In terms of public participation, Parliament has a website that provides up to date information regarding committee meetings, programmes, legislation underway and public hearings.



### 3.3 Gender-sensitive Parliaments

All delegates were in agreement that a gender-sensitive Parliament is one that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and work. A key objective of the IPU strategy for 2007-12 is to advance gender equality by fostering gender-sensitive change in parliament. The IPU has produced the first ever global analysis on gender mainstreaming in parliament and gender-sensitive parliaments. It has mapped the current situation and identified good practices. In so doing, the IPU has committed to develop and several initiatives to achieve and these include the following:

- Work to develop standards and issue guidelines on gender-sensitive policies and procedures.
- Provide capacity-building support to parliamentary bodies that deal with gender equality and women's issues.
- Assist members of parliament and parliamentary staff to build their capacities in gender mainstreaming and will facilitate the exchange of good practices.

A member of the South Africa delegation shared a South African perspective in terms of what the South African Parliament has implemented to instil a gender-sensitive parliament. Firstly, delegates were informed about the existing structures in South African Parliament that specifically deal with women and gender specific matters. The three key structures within the South African Parliament leading gender mainstreaming is the Portfolio and Select Committee on Women Children and People with Disabilities and the Multi-Party Women's Caucus. A brief description was provided as to mandate and function of each entity.

The Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth, Children and Persons with Disabilities is a new parliamentary committee established in the 4th democratic Parliament of South Africa. The Committee replaces the Joint Monitoring Committee on the Improvement of Quality of Life and Status of Women and the Joint Monitoring Committee on Children, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. The Portfolio Committee which is located in the National Assembly also has an equivalent Select Committee in the National Council of Provinces (NCOP).

The main functions of these committees in relation to women include:

- Holding accountable the Executive structures that are responsible for improving the lives of Women
- Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of and overseeing legislation impacting on women
- Influencing, mobilising, monitoring and overseeing that appropriate budgets are allocated for the implementation of legislation, policies and programmes targeted at women
- Ensuring that women are considered and prioritised in all legislation, policies and programmes.



- Ensuring that the needs of women are mainstreamed into the core functions of Government Departments, organs of state, public entities and civil society at large.
- Ensuring compliance with international and regional treaties that has a bearing on Women
- Creating opportunities for public participation with civil society on key matters pertaining to women.

The Multiparty Women's Caucus (MPWC) was officially launched on 18 March 2008, with the objective of creating a platform for highlighting women's perspectives within the context of Parliament's activities; influencing and focusing discussions on issues affecting women; acting as an advisory and consultative body representing the interests and concerns of women Members of Parliament, and engaging in empowerment issues with women in political structures outside Parliament and internationally. The MPWC acts as an advisory, influencing and consultative body through its representation of the interests and concerns of women MPs.

The South African experience demonstrated that the aforementioned structures have gender mainstreaming within their mandates as a key imperative. Moreover, gender issues are considered in the development and review of legislation, when conducting oversight and monitoring the implementation relevant international and regional treaties. In addition, other mechanisms used include debates in the House, member statements etc. The aforementioned structures have actively pursued capacitating members on gender mainstreaming by having workshops with experts in the field on specific subject matters, for instance, gender responsive budgeting.

#### **4. RESOLUTIONS**

*It is important to note that no agreed conclusions were adopted on the Commission's priority theme, that is, The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges.<sup>1</sup>*

As part of the 56<sup>th</sup> CSW Session, the Plenary adopted 6 resolutions that would be actioned through the United Nations General Assembly and which would be reported on at the 57th CSW Session. It should be noted that unlike at the previous session, the South African delegation had not initiated any resolutions and did not play any significant role in the development of the resolutions.

##### **4.1 Ending Female Genital Mutilation**

The CSW recommended to the Economic and Social Council the approval of the following draft decision for adoption by the General Assembly: "Ending female genital mutilation":

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations (2012)



“The General Assembly, recalling its resolutions 56/128 of 19 December 2001, 58/156 of 22 December 2003 and 60/141 of 16 December 2005, Commission on the Status of Women resolutions 51/2 of 9 March 2007, 52/2 of 7 March 2008 and 54/7 of 12 March 2010, as well as agreed conclusions of the Commission, and all other relevant resolutions, and taking note of the report of the Secretary-General<sup>1</sup> on ending female genital mutilation and the recommendations contained therein, decides to consider the issue of ending female genital mutilation at its sixty-seventh session under the agenda item entitled ‘Advancement of women’.”

#### **4.2 Indigenous women: key actors in poverty and hunger eradication**

This resolution expressed deep concern about the increasing feminization of poverty, emphasising that the empowerment of women, including indigenous women, is a critical factor in the eradication of poverty and that the implementation of special measures aimed at empowering women can help to achieve this objective. It also recognised that poverty of women, including that of indigenous women, is directly related, to the absence of economic opportunities and of autonomy, lack of access to economic resources, lack of access to education and support services, and minimal participation in the decision-making process. Further concern was also expressed about the extreme disadvantages that indigenous peoples, in particular indigenous women, have typically faced across a range of social and economic indicators and the impediments to their full enjoyment of their rights. In addition, the adverse impacts of climate change on women and girls, including indigenous women, can be exacerbated by gender inequality, discrimination and poverty. Moreover, it was stated that indigenous women often suffer from multiple forms of discrimination and poverty which increase their vulnerability to all forms of violence. Thus emphasizing that indigenous women should exercise their rights free from discrimination of any kind.

Member States were urged to undertake several initiatives such as:

- Particular measures to promote and strengthen policies and programmes for indigenous women with their full participation and respect for their cultural diversity.
- States were also urged to support the economic activities of indigenous women, in consultation with them and taking into account their traditional knowledge, so as to improve their situation and development, in particular by enhancing their equal access to productive resources and agricultural inputs, such as land, seeds, financial services, technology, transportation and information.
- Emphasis was placed on ensuring the realisation of the right of indigenous women and girls to education, and promote a multicultural approach to education that is responsive to the needs, aspirations and cultures of indigenous women, including by developing appropriate education programmes, curricula and teaching aids, to the extent possible in the languages of indigenous peoples, by promoting their access to information and communications technologies and by providing for the participation of indigenous women in these processes, and take measures to ensure that indigenous women and girls have the right to equal access to all levels and forms of education without discrimination;
- Provide support, investment and technical assistance for the training of indigenous women, and support women’s organizations and cooperatives, which contribute to promoting mutual support and leadership;



- Formulate and implement, in consultation and collaboration with indigenous women and their organizations, policies and programmes designed to promote capacity-building processes and strengthen their leadership, and take measures to ensure full and effective participation of indigenous women in decision-making processes at all levels and in all areas, and eliminate barriers for their participation in political, economic, social and cultural life;
- Concrete measures to provide and enhance equal access and enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health for indigenous women, including sexual and reproductive health, and access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation, and safe cooking and heating;
- Respect, preserve and promote, where appropriate, the traditional knowledge of indigenous women with respect to medicine, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals;
- Comply with and effectively implement all their human rights obligations so as to ensure the full realization and equal enjoyment of the rights of indigenous women;
- Take concrete measures to provide equal access to justice for indigenous women at all levels, and ensure that indigenous women have equal rights to own land and other property;
- Take actions at the national, local and community levels to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against indigenous women;
- Collect and disseminate disaggregated data on indigenous women, including those living in rural areas, in order to monitor and improve the impact of development policies and programmes for their well-being;
- Support the participation of indigenous women in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also called Rio+20, and in the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly that is to be called the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, to be held in 2014;

In addition, Member States, intergovernmental organisations, the private sector and civil society were also encouraged to take appropriate measures to promote the rights of indigenous peoples, and respect their cultures, lands, territories and resources and their contribution to sustainable development. UN-Women and, as appropriate, relevant funds, programmes and specialised agencies of the United Nations system, international financial institutions, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors were also encouraged to take measures to develop, finance, implement and support policies and programmes aimed at promoting the empowerment of indigenous women and their enjoyment of all human rights.

#### **4.3 Women, the Girl and HIV and AIDS**

This resolution requests the Secretary-General to submit a report to the CSW at its 58th Session on the situation of women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS, with an emphasis on accelerated actions taken in regard to women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS, in accordance with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on





Population and Développement, the HIV and AIDS Political Declarations and commitments, using information provided by Member States, and the United Nations system.

#### **4.4 Release of Women and Children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts**

This resolution from the onset expressed its concern of the continuation of armed conflicts in many regions throughout the world and the human suffering and humanitarian emergencies they cause. To this end women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts, whether international or non-international, are victims of serious violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law and continue to have a negative impact on efforts to put an end to those conflicts and cause suffering to the families of those women and children, and stressing, in this regard, the need to address the issue from a humanitarian perspective, among others. The resolution emphasises that all forms of violence in areas of armed conflict committed against the civilian population as such, including taking women and children hostage, seriously contravene international humanitarian law, in particular as set out in the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949. The resolution is also emphatic and is cognisant of the fact that States that are parties to an armed conflict have a responsibility not to take hostage and subsequently imprison women and children in armed conflict and to ensure accountability as regards implementation of relevant mechanisms, policies and laws in order to protect them, bearing in mind that all parties to the conflict must refrain from hostage-taking. Concern was also expressed that, despite the efforts of the international community, acts of hostage-taking in different forms and manifestations, inter alia, those committed by terrorists and armed groups, continue to take place and have even increased in many regions of the world,

This resolution stated the following it:

- *Reaffirms* that hostage-taking, wherever and by whomever committed, is an illegal act aimed at the destruction of human rights and is, under any circumstances, unjustifiable;
- *Condemns* all violent acts committed against the civilian population as such, in violation of international humanitarian law in situations of armed conflict, and calls for an effective response to such acts, in particular the immediate release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts, including by strengthening international cooperation in this field;
- *Condemns* the consequences of hostage-taking, in particular torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, murder, rape, slavery and trafficking in women and children;
- *Urges* States that are parties to an armed conflict to take all necessary measures, in a timely manner, to determine the identity, fate and whereabouts of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts, and, to the greatest possible extent, to provide their family members, through appropriate channels, with all relevant information they have on their fate and whereabouts;
- *Invites*, in this regard, States to adopt a comprehensive approach, including all appropriate legal and practical measures and coordination mechanisms;



- *Recognizes* the need for the collection, protection and management of information on women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts, according to international and national legal norms and standards, and urges States to cooperate with each other and with other appropriate actors working in this area, inter alia, by providing all relevant and appropriate information;
- *Strongly urges* all parties to armed conflicts to respect fully the norms of international humanitarian law and to take all necessary measures for the protection of the civilian population as such, including measures to prevent and combat acts of hostage-taking;
- *Urges* all parties to armed conflicts to provide safe, unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance for those women and children, in accordance with international humanitarian law;
- *Also urges* all parties to an armed conflict to cooperate fully with the International Committee of the Red Cross in establishing the fate and whereabouts of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned;
- *Stresses* both the need to put an end to impunity and the responsibility of all States to prosecute or bring to justice in accordance with international law those responsible for war crimes, including hostage-taking;
- *Also stresses* the need for addressing the issue of release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts, also as a part of peace processes, with reference to all justice and rule of law mechanisms, on the basis of transparency, accountability and public involvement and participation;
- *Emphasizes* the importance of objective, responsible and impartial information, including improved analysis and dissemination of sex- and age disaggregated data, on hostages, verifiable by relevant international organizations, in facilitating their release, and calls for assistance to those organizations in this regard;
- *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure, in the context of the present resolution, the widest possible dissemination of relevant material, in particular material relating to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), within existing resources;
- *Also requests* the Secretary-General and all relevant international organizations to use their capabilities and undertake efforts to facilitate the immediate release of civilian women and children who have been taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned;
- *Invites* the special rapporteurs, within their respective mandates, as well as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, to continue to address the issue of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts and its consequences;
- *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-eighth session a report on the implementation of the present resolution, including relevant practical recommendations, taking into account the information provided by States and relevant international organizations;
- *Decides* to consider the question at its 58th Session.



#### 4.5 Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

This Resolution expressed outward concern about the increased difficulties being faced by Palestinian women and girls living under Israeli occupation, including the continuation of home demolitions, evictions of Palestinians, the revocation of residency rights and arbitrary detention and imprisonment, as well as high rates of poverty and unemployment, food insecurity, inadequate water supply, incidents of domestic violence, and declining health, education and living standards, including the rising incidence of trauma and decline in their psychological well-being, and also expressed grave concern about the dire humanitarian crisis and insecurity and instability on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular in the Gaza Strip. The dire economic and social conditions of Palestinian women and girls in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the systematic violation of their human rights resulting from the severe impact of ongoing illegal Israeli practices, including displacement and the confiscation of land, particularly in connection with the construction and expansion of settlements and the Wall, which continue to constitute a major obstacle to peace on the basis of the two-State solution, and the continued imposition of closures and restrictions on the movement of persons and goods, which have detrimentally affected their right to health care, including access for pregnant women to health services for antenatal care and safe delivery, education, employment, development and freedom of movement. Specific emphasis was placed on the critical socio-economic and humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, including that resulting from the Israeli military operations and the imposition of a blockade consisting of the prolonged closure of border crossings and severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods, as well as the continued impeding of the reconstruction process by Israel, the occupying Power, which has detrimentally affected every aspect of the lives of the civilian population, especially women and children, in the Gaza Strip.

This Resolution, reaffirms that the Israeli occupation remains the major obstacle for Palestinian women with regard to their advancement, self-reliance and integration in the development of their society, and stresses the importance of efforts to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution and to ensure their equal participation and involvement in all efforts for the achievement, maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Specific recommendations included the following:

- The international community was called upon, in this regard, to continue to provide urgently needed assistance, especially emergency assistance, and services in an effort to alleviate the dire humanitarian crisis being faced by Palestinian women and their families and to help in the reconstruction of relevant Palestinian institutions, with the integration of a gender perspective into all of its international assistance programmes, and commends the implementation of the Palestinian Authority's plan of August 2009 for constructing the institutions of an independent Palestinian State within a twenty-four-month period and the significant achievements made, as confirmed by international institutions, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations;
- *Demands* that Israel, the occupying Power, comply fully with the provisions and principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Regulations annexed to the Hague Convention IV of 1907,<sup>9</sup> the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian



Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949,<sup>10</sup> and all other relevant rules, principles and instruments of international law, including the International Covenants on Human Rights, in order to protect the rights of Palestinian women and their families;

- The international community was also urged to continue to give special attention to the promotion and protection of the human rights of Palestinian women and girls and to intensify its measures to improve the difficult conditions being faced by Palestinian women and their families living under Israeli occupation;
- Israel was called upon to facilitate the return of all refugees and displaced Palestinian women and children to their homes and properties, in compliance with the relevant United Nations resolutions;
- There was an urgent need for sustained and active international involvement, including by the Quartet, to support both parties in resuming, advancing and accelerating the peace process negotiations for the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement, on the basis of United Nations resolutions, the Quartet road map to a permanent two-State solution to the Israeli- Palestinian conflict and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States at its fourteenth session;
- The CSW was requested to continue to monitor and take action with regard to the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women,<sup>2</sup> in particular paragraph 260 concerning Palestinian women and children, the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”;
- The Secretary-General was requested to continue reviewing the situation, to assist Palestinian women by all available means, including those laid out in the report of the Secretary-General on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, and to submit to the CSW at its 57th Session a report, including information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, on the progress made in the implementation of the present resolution.

#### **4.6 Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Natural Disasters**

Natural disasters affect human lives and living conditions thereafter, and often have a more direct and adverse impact on women, as well as vulnerable people within groups such as children, older persons and persons with disabilities. Moreover, natural disasters often have different impacts on men and women in regards to the associated risks and vulnerabilities, due to gender inequality, gender stereotypes and discrimination against women, including the lack of equal access to adequate information, economic opportunities, and poverty and social exclusion, safety and different family responsibilities.

The following specific recommendations were made:

Governments were urged and, where appropriate, United Nations entities, civil society, including non-governmental organizations, and private sector, and other stakeholders to:



- Review national policies, strategies and plans and take action to integrate a gender perspective in policies, planning and funding for disaster risk reduction, response and recovery, considering the different impacts that natural disasters have on women and men,
- Ensure the equal opportunities for participation of women in decision-making including with regard to the allocation of resources at all levels regarding disaster risk reduction, response and recovery,
- Strengthen the capacities of relevant authorities and institutions at all levels to apply a gender-sensitive approach to disaster risk reduction (prevention, mitigation and preparedness), response and recovery, while raising their awareness, and promote cooperation among them,
- Ensure the full enjoyment by women and girls of all human rights in every phase of disaster risk reduction (prevention, mitigation and preparedness), response and recovery,
- Make the utmost efforts to secure equal access to disaster relief assistance between women and men and provide disaster response and support for recovery that is fully responsive to the needs, views and enjoyment of all human rights of women with special attention paid to the needs of pregnant and lactating women, families with infants, single-headed households and widows, such as in the context of the provision of food and supplies, water and sanitation, the set-up and management of shelter, safety and security, and the provision of physical, psychological, and emergency health care, including for sexual and reproductive health, and counseling services, while encouraging the involvement of female professionals and gender-balance among field workers,
- Ensure that in post-disaster environments, special attention is given to sexual and gender-based violence and to the prevention of various forms of exploitation, including the risk of trafficking and the particular vulnerability of girls, unaccompanied children and orphans,
- Ensure, in post-disaster environments, the protection of and care and support to the victims of violence and, as appropriate, the provision of legal and other relevant services for victims of violence to aid in the, inter alia, investigation and the prosecution of sexual and gender based violence, taking into account women's needs in order to avoid the re-victimization of women,
- Design, implement, and evaluate gender-sensitive economic relief and recovery projects, including vocational and technical skills training measures in order to help ensure equal economic opportunities between men and women, paying attention to eliminating obstacles to women's rapid integration or reintegration into the formal employment sector, owing to their role in the social and economic process, and taking into account the rural and urban migration that natural disasters may provoke,
- Promote income-generating activities and employment opportunities for women affected by natural disasters, particularly rural women, including through supporting the community-based businesses, the establishment of necessary social services, and access to market, credit and other financial services,
- Ensure women and men's equal access to natural-hazard early warning systems and promote disaster risk reduction planning, taking into account of the specific needs, and views and all human rights of women and men, and raise public awareness,



- Ensure women and girls' equal access to and use of information, training, and formal and non-formal education on disaster risk reduction, in order for women and girls to fully use these resources,
- Systematically collect demographic and socio-economic data and information disaggregated by sex, age and disability and continue to develop gender indicators and analyze gender differences, including through gender-sensitive needs assessment and planning processes, and integrate this information into disaster risk reduction and management policies and programs,
- Document and assess disaster responses from a gender perspective, and widely disseminate, both nationally, regionally and internationally, information on good practices, lessons learned and tools, including technologies in support of disaster risk reduction, in order to promote and ensure their integration into disaster risk reduction planning,
- Recognise and further promote the role of civil society, including community-based organizations, women's organizations and volunteers, in disaster management and in promoting the building of an inclusive, disaster-resilient society that ensures women's full participation,
- Emphasis was also placed in the establishment of partnerships with key stakeholders, including Governments, United Nations entities and other relevant actors such as civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector in order to strengthen gender perspective in all aspects of disaster risk reduction, response and recovery,
- Governments, local authorities, the United Nations system, regional organizations, and invites donors and other assisting countries were encouraged to address the vulnerabilities and capacities of women and girls through gender-responsive
- programming and the allocation of resources in their disaster risk reduction, response and recovery efforts in coordination with the Governments of affected countries,
- A request was also made to all relevant United Nations entities, according to their mandate, to ensure that a gender perspective continues to be mainstreamed into all aspects of disaster risk reduction, response and recovery,
- In addition the United Nations system, member states and other stakeholders were requested to continue to promote the inclusion of a gender perspective in its activities on disaster risk reduction, including at the third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015,
- Finally a request was made to the Secretary-General to report to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-eighth session on the implementation of the present resolution, including suggestions on how to further address the issue on gender equality and the empowerment of women in natural disasters within the existing UN framework.

#### **4.7 Eliminating maternal mortality and morbidity through the empowerment of women**

This Resolution noted with concern that more than 350,000 women and adolescent girls still die every year from largely preventable complications related to pregnancy or childbirth. The Resolution further noted that adolescent girls face a higher risk of complications and death and that



the average annual percentage decline in the global maternal mortality ratio still falls short of the figure of 5.5 per cent required to achieve the first target of Millennium Development Goal 5.

- Member States were urged, in cooperation with the international community and civil society, to improve systems to register pregnancies, births and deaths and to support improved public health infrastructure for the collection, analysis and dissemination of data on the burden of maternal morbidity and mortality and its causes at the national and sub-national level, including through the use of mobile technologies, where appropriate;
- A request was made to the Secretary-General to continue to expand the knowledge base, including the United Nations website, on the progress made towards the achievement of the Goals;
- A request was also made to the Secretary-General to provide a report to the CSW at its 58th Session, in consultation with Member States, international organizations and all other relevant stakeholders, taking into account relevant United Nations resolutions, on actions to strengthen linkages among programmes, initiatives and activities throughout the United Nations system for gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, protection of all of their human rights and the elimination of preventable maternal mortality and morbidity.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations have been identified based on observations and outcomes of the sessions by the South African Parliamentary delegation.

### **5.1 Implementing Resolutions**

Numerous Resolutions that emerged at the 56<sup>th</sup> Session have relevance to South Africa. A framework needs to be developed and tracking mechanism to ensure that Resolutions are indeed implemented at a country level and that Parliament is kept abreast of developments in this regard. Moreover, improved co-ordination in Parliament is required to ensure effective follow-up of Resolutions.

### **5.2 Gender sensitive audit**

The IPU discussions and publications on the gender-sensitive audit are a particularly useful tool which the South African Parliament can apply. A gender-sensitive audit of Parliament's current term will provide insight into what the achievements are as well as identify challenges and gaps all of which that can directly contribute to a review of initiatives and inform the 5th Parliamentary term.

### **5.3 UNCSW 57<sup>th</sup> session – Gender Based Violence a submission by South African Parliament.**

The theme for the 57<sup>th</sup> Session is focussed on gender based violence to which the South African Parliament has an invaluable contribution to make. To this end it is proposed that the



request is put forward to host a side event at the 57<sup>th</sup> Session which focuses on South Africa's best practice examples.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The CSW 56<sup>th</sup> Session had robust discussion on several matters that impact on the empowerment of rural women and girls as well as a focus on gender based violence in preparation for the 57<sup>th</sup> Session. The impact of the Resolutions can only be effective if implemented at a country level to which Member States are responsible and Parliaments have a valuable role to play. The Department for Women, Children and People with Disabilities have a crucial role to play in reporting back to Parliament on the 56<sup>th</sup> session and provide a strategy as to how the Resolutions are to be implemented. To this end, stringent oversight is required.

## **7. REFERENCES**

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women (2012) Agreed Conclusions of the CSW on the Critical Areas of Concern of the Beijing Platform for Action (1996 - 2011) - Agreed Conclusions. 56th session (27 February - 9 March and 15 March 2012), Accessed: [Internet: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/agreedconclusions.html#52>]