

United Nations
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



THIRTY-EIGHTH SESSION

Official Records*

THIRD COMMITTEE
38th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 9 November 1983
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 38th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. CHAVANAVIRAJ (Thailand)

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.3/38/SR.38
21 November 1983
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

16 p

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

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AGENDA ITEM 92: ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
(continued) (A/C.3/38/L.19)

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
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- (b) STATUS OF THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/38/378)

1. Mr. ARCILLA (Philippines) said that his delegation supported the provisional agenda for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women, proposed in document A/CONF.116/PC/9. In particular, his delegation welcomed item 8, because it believed that the lack of progress in achieving greater equality for women in developing countries was closely connected with underdevelopment, which itself stemmed primarily from an inequitable international economic order. Moreover, he believed that, in view of the considerable range of issues relating to each agenda item as well as the differences of opinion, it was essential to have a clear focus on priority problems in order to lend coherence to the preparatory activities and to ensure that the Conference was a success.

2. There was near-consensus on the fact that, although the results of the Decade had been significant, they had not been entirely satisfactory. Therefore, it would be desirable for the preparatory body of the 1985 Conference to begin immediately to identify and analyse the main obstacles preventing the attainment of the objectives of the Decade so that the Conference would be able to adopt forward-looking strategies.

3. He observed that women's access to education, gainful employment and health services depended largely on rural development, since the majority of women in the developing countries lived in rural areas. Education itself opened the door to a

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(Mr. Arcilla, Philippines)

wider variety of income-generating activities. In that connection, he noted with satisfaction that, in the low-income countries, the enrolment of girls in primary school had risen from 34 per cent in 1960 to 80 per cent in 1980 and, in 1980 was practically the same as that of boys in the middle-income countries. The overall drop in the grain production of 69 developing countries from 1980 to 1981 highlighted the critical role women played in meeting food needs of millions of rural homes in those countries. It was therefore obvious that, in order to achieve equality, development and peace with regard to women in that context, efforts must focus on equitable access to credit and investments, on technical assistance, co-operatives, extension services and land reform. For those reasons, his delegation believed that, as part of their development efforts, countries should devote special attention to the advancement of women and the 1935 Conference should review measures to be taken to overcome hunger, poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy which still afflicted hundreds of millions of women throughout the world.

4. His Government attached great importance to improving the status of women in the Philippines. In the context of the Decade, it had established a National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women with a view to achieving the integration of women, as full and equal partners of men, in the development effort. The Commission co-ordinated activities directed toward the execution of a five-year programme, whose first phase concerned the education of rural women, with emphasis on family life and planning, the environment, conservation of resources, justice and consumer protection.

5. Improving the condition of women was also closely linked to the implementation of the relevant legislative and administrative reforms. In that connection, he urged those States which had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. He also expressed the hope that, having adopted its rules of procedure, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women would immediately begin its consideration of the reports of States parties to the Convention. That Committee could also make a valuable contribution to the 1985 World Conference.

6. As to the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, he believed that priorities should be established among the ambitious tasks it had set itself so that it could use its limited resources effectively. Referring to the role of women in the implementation of the policy of collective self-reliance of developing countries, particularly in the context of economic and technical co-operation among developing countries, he drew the Institute's attention to the projects concerning co-operatives, pharmaceuticals and the communication of development information, currently being implemented by the non-aligned countries, and urged the Institute to execute its projects in co-ordination with similar ongoing projects in the developing countries so as to avoid any duplication of effort.

7. The number of requests for support addressed to the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women showed that there was a large unmet demand in connection with the integration of women in economic development. Accordingly, the

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role of the Fund should be enhanced. The distribution of resources and projects also appeared to be unbalanced: only 12 per cent of the projects were geared towards rural development, and the region of Asia and the Pacific, where half of the world's poor women lived, received only 25 per cent of the Fund's resources. He expressed the hope that the forward-looking assessment of Fund-assisted activities, to be completed shortly, would help to identify priorities for the future and would shed some light on the structural problems which influenced situations of inequality. With regard to the Knowledge Bank proposed by the Fund, he pointed out that there were already approximately 300 information systems within the United Nations and that most of them were used minimally, primarily because they were not integrated with other information systems. It would be advisable for the Knowledge Bank to be linked to the UNDP information systems and also to serve the information needs of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women.

8. Mr. RUIZ CABAÑAS (Mexico) said that the Mexican Government attached the highest importance to the concept of equality between men and women and therefore strongly supported all the activities for the advancement of women undertaken by the United Nations.

9. His Government had carefully studied the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade for Women (A/38/146) and noted with satisfaction that more and more governmental and non-governmental organizations were reporting to the United Nations on the activities they were undertaking within the framework of the Programme of Action; it was to be hoped that such co-operation would continue and be expanded.

10. The 1985 World Conference had the task of appraising the achievements of the Decade, which had been partly negative and partly positive. It could be said, on the one hand, that through a variety of activities in the social, political, cultural and economic fields, the Decade had mobilized the international community and strengthened both the political will of Governments and the will of the general public to bring about full equality between women and men. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that in a number of fields there had not yet been any appreciable improvement in the status of women and that, very often, women neither participated in nor derived any benefits from the development process. Most countries had not yet managed to ensure training, employment and health services for all women under the same conditions as men; it was a fact that the serious world economic crisis had only worsened the situation of women and other disadvantaged groups.

11. He generally supported the recommendations made by the Commission on the Status of Women, as the preparatory body for the 1985 World Conference, in its report (A/CONF.116/PC/9). With regard to the rules of procedure for the Conference which the preparatory body was required to draw up, he wished to emphasize that adoption of the rule that decisions should as far as possible be taken by consensus, must not have the effect of giving countries a veto over the decisions and recommendations that would be adopted at the 1985 Conference.

(Mr. Ruiz Caballero, Mexico)

12. He welcomed the fact that the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women had become operational. A representative of Mexico would be serving on the Institute's Board of Trustees with effect from January 1984, and he hoped that the membership of the Board would be enlarged in order better to reflect the principle of equitable geographical distribution.

13. He urged all States which had not yet done so to become parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Mexico, one of the first States to ratify the Convention, had submitted its first report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women under article 18 of the Convention in August 1983; in that report, the Mexican Government had stated that it had begun a thorough review of national legislation with the aim of bringing it into conformity with the provisions of the Convention. In the meantime, the Government had provided the Committee with full statistics on the status of women in the fields of employment, health and education. In view of the importance of the Committee's work, it should be provided with summary records on a regular basis.

14. In his opinion, the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs should remain in Vienna so that all United Nations agencies are not concentrated in one city.

15. Mrs. RANA (Nepal) said that the United Nations Decade for Women had contributed significantly to international efforts to focus attention on and increase awareness of the condition of women, even though there was still a long way to go before actual equality between women and men in the economic, social and political fields was achieved. Nepal attached great importance to practical measures to implement the recommendations of the Programme of Action for the second half of the United Nations Decade for Women, and in particular to technical co-operation activities that will ensure women's participation, as agents and beneficiaries, in all sectors and at all levels of development. She welcomed the activities being undertaken by intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

16. Her Government noted with satisfaction that 90 States had signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and that 52 of them had ratified or acceded to it.

17. She welcomed the very significant recommendations made by the Commission on the Status of Women, acting as the preparatory body for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women, and the fact that they had been adopted by consensus. The activities which the Commission was planning to undertake prior to the 1985 Conference seemed sound; she supported the proposal to hold regional preparatory meetings. She agreed with the provisional agenda proposed by the preparatory body, especially its focus on the sub-themes of employment, health and education; Nepal attached great importance to forward looking strategies for the advancement of women to the year 2000 and practical measures to overcome obstacles to the achievement of the objectives of

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the Decade. She welcomed the establishment of a special trust fund to assist in preparations for the 1985 Conference, and in particular the decision to use some of the resources of the fund to enable the least developed countries to participate in the Conference.

18. She noted with satisfaction that the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women was supporting a growing number of different projects, and believed that the Fund should be continued after the end of the Decade. She expressed gratitude to the Fund for the approval of a project in Nepal relating to the establishment of a citrus nursery, orange juice preservation and vegetable seed production.

19. In her view, the Secretary-General rightly emphasized in his note (A/38/406) the importance of basing the activities of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women on the network concept, which would help it to play a more effective role in enhancing the status of women in developing countries; the importance of TCDC activities in the integration of women in development should also be stressed.

20. The questionnaire sent to Member States by the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs would provide useful guidance in assessing progress towards equality of the sexes and determining how further to improve the status of women. In Nepal, nearly all the female population lived in remote rural areas; 98.1 per cent of the active women, were engaged in agriculture as compared with 92.8 per cent of the men, and those women generated more household income than did the men. That pointed up the particularly significant role that women played in subsistence farming and in the economy in general. It also showed that women were central and not marginal to the process of development. Their integration in the development process was thus not only a matter of social justice but also an economic imperative.

21. Her Government had taken measures to improve the status of women and promote their broadest possible participation in national life, particularly through reforms in law, education, health, employment and local development. An amendment to the civil code had granted women rights to their father's and husband's property, the right to divorce on the grounds of adultery by the husband and the right to child custody. Polygamy had been prohibited. Free primary education had been instituted, partly in order to eliminate illiteracy among women, which was one of the major causes of their backwardness in many areas. Nepal was striving to make it possible for women to receive an education, be employed and have access to health services under the same conditions as men, particularly by establishing vocational training programmes, promoting income-generating activities and establishing family planning and maternal and child welfare services in the villages.

22. Obviously, such measures could not in a decade bring about profound social changes in a country like Nepal, which was handicapped by its economic backwardness, its multiple traditions and the linguistic and ethnic diversity of

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its population. Nevertheless, the identification of the problems which arose was an important first step. The establishment of a co-ordination committee for women's services had helped achieve the objectives of the Decade. It was hoped that the 1985 World Conference would improve the status of women in all spheres.

23. Mrs. WARZAZI (Morocco) said that the United Nations Decade for Women, which would end in 1985, had been quite successful, unlike the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination. Everyone had finally recognized the importance of the participation of that half of mankind in the economic and social development of countries. However, that reality, which had brought about an awareness of the situation, and therefore the elaboration of appropriate policies in that regard, had led the defenders of women's rights to demand that women should not only be a factor in development, but also the beneficiaries of development. That step had been absolutely necessary because it had happened over the years that, under the pretext of implementing the principle of equality, women had been made to take the difficult and unprofitable jobs abandoned by men, who had gone on to higher levels of education and training. In certain countries therefore a category of female labourers similar to migrant workers had begun to appear within the working population.

24. In-depth studies had led to certain conclusions concerning the reasons why the emancipation of women seemed, in certain respects, to have led to an impasse in the industrialized and semi-developed countries. Although the number of women holding responsible positions in the economic and public life of countries had considerably increased, that had not been reflected in a basic change in the status of women and it appeared that women had become an instrument for satisfying the changing needs of the national economy for low-level manpower. It was also interesting to note that a famous biologist had reached the conclusion that the universally accepted idea that men and women were equal had led to inequality for women because the differences between the sexes were disregarded, to the detriment of women. Women had to compete with men in institutions created by men and they were always the object of discrimination. The egalitarian society did not take account of that or of the influence of women's biological make-up on their social, psychological and economic behaviour. According to that biologist, therefore, labour in the world should be organized in terms of the characteristics of women because that would result in a more humane and more effective arrangement between the system and the individual.

25. Furthermore, she reiterated that the problems of women should not be solved in a uniform manner on the basis of experience obtained in one part of the world; solutions should take account of the realities of the civilization, culture and traditions of each country. For that reason, her delegation had always considered unrealistic the attempts made by European women during the elaboration of international instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted in 1979, to give priority to demands which the women of the third world did not consider really relevant, such as the right of women to choose their residence when they married, or the sharing of household tasks between husband and wife, and so forth. Women in developing countries had

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far more serious problems and concerns. Of course, the demands of women in developed countries were also valid for women in developing countries, but for the latter the objectives were still unattainable and it was absolutely necessary to take that difference into consideration at the level of national, regional and international action. Women in developing countries must first of all demand further action in the field of education and training and must be able to choose their employment freely. The privileged women in developing countries must join forces and demand positions of responsibility and decision-making posts in order to be able, through their functions, to promote steady improvement in the status of their underprivileged sisters.

26. The feminist movements in the developed countries, in reaction to the discrimination to which women had been subjected, had attempted to eliminate everything which in their opinion could constitute a factor of discrimination and had even gone so far as to oppose motherhood, marriage and even men. That was not a positive approach, particularly in view of the fact that Governments had now provided women with the means of planning their families. Women in the third world countries were deeply attached to the family and could on no account support action which might threaten its existence. Besides, all the studies demonstrated that there was a tendency to rediscover the importance of the family in society and the importance of women in the family. Feminists, who had based their struggle on the independence of women from the family, were committing a grave error, as exemplified by the enormous social problems confronting modern industrial societies, such as juvenile delinquency, the instability of the children of divorced couples, the use of drugs, alcoholism, nervous depression and mental illness, which resulted from that situation. Furthermore, in the report on channels of communication between the United Nations and youth and youth organizations (A/38/339), the Secretary-General recommended strengthening the role of the family in the education of young people. She wondered whether it would not be possible to "socialize" the tasks of women who wished to work in the family environment by training mothers to care for their children or their households as they would be trained for an occupation or a profession. That seemed to be the case in Japan and Denmark, where housewives received a salary. Furthermore, she stressed the fact that women in developing countries, unlike Western women who were active in feminist movements, were not the adversaries of men. They wished to enlist the co-operation and understanding of men in order to collaborate with them and be their full partners in all fields.

27. Improving the status of women and implementing the principle of equality with men should not lead to the abolition of the innate rights of women, which were based on their status as women. It was primarily mothers that were responsible for the children, and, in the event of divorce, they should have custody of them. After centuries of discrimination, it would only be fair if contemporary women were able to enjoy all their rights and still retain the few privileges which society had accorded them.

28. The World Conference should base its discussions on real situations and should consider the problems of women in the world in a spirit of mutual understanding and tolerance. The same spirit should prevail in the Committee set

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(Mrs. Warzazi, Morocco)

up in implementation of the Convention, which should not allow itself to be tempted by political sirens, but, on the contrary, should seriously consider the reports of Governments without any sign of extremism or fanaticism, which would render their work totally ineffectual.

29. Her delegation expressed confidence in the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, whose work would be very useful for Governments and women.

30. Nevertheless, it was surprising that the request made in 1982 in paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 37/60 had been ignored. That was a rather dangerous precedent for the future of resolutions adopted by consensus and it was necessary to be very vigilant in that respect. When the General Assembly had decided at the end of 1978 to change the method of appointing the Secretary-General of the Conference, it had certainly had reasons for doing so, and those reasons should still be valid in 1982. It was therefore incomprehensible why that request had not been duly taken into consideration. That created a climate detrimental both to the preparations for and the holding of the 1985 World Conference. There was no need to take hasty action since it had only been at the end of 1978, two years before the Copenhagen Conference, that the General Assembly had decided to finalize all the details of the Conference, including its provisional agenda. A time interval such as the one set forth in General Assembly resolution 37/60 would have allowed the General Assembly to be informed of the difficulties which might arise between the two sessions.

31. Lastly, it was to be hoped that women would be able to express their demands clearly and unambiguously, but on the basis of firm unity of opinion and action.

32. Mr. CHIKETA (Zimbabwe) said that when the United Nations had launched the Decade for Women in 1975, his country and the majority of its inhabitants had been suffering from racial discrimination and under-development and had been engaged in a bloody war of liberation. Men and women had fought together and the war could never have been won without the support of the women, particularly the women in rural areas. At the current time, in spite of a lingering feeling of superiority among some men and in spite of customs and traditions which were opposed to change, the people of Zimbabwe had become aware of the fact that men and women must continue to work together in order to develop the country. In the framework of the programme for national transformation, which had been launched after the war in order to change both the physical structures of the nation and the mentality of its inhabitants, the Government had set up the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs, which had the task of speedily improving the status of women to enable them to assume their rightful role in society as partners on an equal footing with men. The Government planned to eliminate gradually all the traditional social, economic and legal factors which prevented the advancement of women and to ensure that women participated fully in the national development effort. The struggle of women for equality was the continuation of the struggle waged by all Zimbabweans for equality before the law and for equal opportunities for individual development through national development.

(Mr. Chiketa, Zimbabwe)

33. A study carried out by the Ministry had demonstrated that in order to achieve the objectives set for the advancement of women, a greater number of girls should be able to receive formal and informal education, professional training courses should be organized, kindergartens and day nurseries set up, and family planning programmes organized in order to meet the needs of the increasing number of women who were employed in the various economic sectors of the nation. Henceforth, women would have their place in national programmes, partly because the Zimbabwean Government, which was guided by the principles of socialism, was determined to ensure that no category of the population was in an inferior position, and partly because the manpower needs required that every citizen should be trained, educated and equipped to participate in the task of national transformation.

34. His country had only recently embarked on the struggle for the advancement and liberation of women and, for that reason, it still had much to do, but its determination in that regard could not be equalled and it had the opportunity to draw on the sympathy and support of many Governments, United Nations bodies (particularly UNICEF) and non-governmental organizations.

35. He drew attention to the fact that, although the problems which women had to face were international in nature, the methods used to solve those problems should take account of the differences in culture and traditions in each country concerned. The International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women should take account of those differences in collating the information gathered in those countries. His Government commended the activities of INSTRAW, but felt that it was necessary to broaden the scope of its work, increase the size of its staff and speed up communication between regions.

36. The situation of women living under the apartheid régime was of particular interest to his delegation. Those women required special assistance because the homelands in which they lived were overpopulated and barren and they hardly had any opportunity to improve their situation since the system was designed to make those areas as inhospitable as possible in order to ensure that the rest of the country had a steady flow of cheap labour.

37. His delegation supported the agenda of the 1985 World Conference, adopted by consensus, which should enable the Conference to present a united front in the struggle against discrimination against women throughout the world and, in particular, in South Africa. The situation of women in the territories occupied by Israel was also similar and, in that regard, he stressed that his country fully supported the Palestinian cause.

38. Lastly, the international community should join forces to solve that problem, which assumed very different forms in various regions of the world, because it was no longer possible to continue to waste such vital human resources.

39. Mr. AIDARA (Senegal) said that his country had, at a very early stage, realized the grave social injustice and the economic anomaly inherent in discriminatory practices against women and, since its accession to independence, Senegal had taken steps to ensure that all members of the community fully

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(Mr. Aidara, Senegal)

participated in the work of national construction. Since 1959, a unit to promote women's activities had been set up within the Office for Promotion and Expansion and, in 1979, a State Secretariat for the Status of Women had been organized within the Government. The female officials of the Secretariat had sought, in particular, to set up organizational groups in which women could express their views. In that way, his Government had established women's associations and women's production groups, which were veritable schools for education and training in rural and urban areas, whose dynamism had been a determining factor in the decision of the Senegalese authorities to undertake a more vigorous policy for the advancement of women. An example of that policy had been the establishment, within the framework of preparations for the sixth national economic and social development plan, of a Commission for the "Integration of Women in National Development". In 1980 the State Secretariat for the Status of Women had merged with the State Secretariat for Human Welfare, the idea being to set up new structures better suited to the objectives of the authorities in improving the living conditions of women. Lastly and most importantly, the National Women's Fortnight, which had replaced the National Women's Day previously held in Senegal on 25 March each year, now gave women the opportunity to make public opinion aware of their concerns, within the framework of meetings organized throughout the national territory and through the media. Those meetings, which had quickly assumed the appearance of a women's body politic, were organized at the technical level by a national committee made up of representatives of the different ministries whose sphere of activities concerned women. One task of that committee was to draw up the programme of activities for the National Women's Fortnight and to formulate recommendations and proposals for action at the end of the Fortnight. The urgent need to draw up a national women's action programme had been demonstrated during one of those events. The programme, which was the result of general concerted effort on the part of women of all classes and sectors of Senegalese society, had been set forth in a single document adopted on 25 March 1981 as the National Action Plan for Senegalese Women. A technical follow-up committee had been established in order to draw-up the project charts relating to the various fields of action set forth in the Plan, namely, education and training, health and nutrition, employment and income-earning activities, and legal aspects. In order to carry out the Plan, an appeal had been made not only to the ministries concerned, but also to the rural communities, national and international non-governmental organizations and to friendly countries which wished to provide support.

40. The appointment of three women as the heads of important ministerial departments (Ministry of Social Development, Department of Emigration, Office of the Secretary of State for Technical Education and Vocational Training), and the increase in the number of deputies augured well for the implementation of that ambitious programme.

41. The next National Women's Fortnight would be devoted entirely to preparations for the 1985 World Conference. His delegation had followed with interest the work of the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the preparatory body for the World Conference, of which Senegal had been an active member, and welcomed the holding of the Conference in Kenya, an African country.

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(Mr. Aidara, Senegal)

42. In Senegal, women were a symbol of unity, for it was round them that the family nucleus was built, shaped and developed in a cohesive and harmonious manner. It was in a spirit of such unity and with resolute will to contribute to the strengthening of friendly relations among peoples that Senegal would participate in the Nairobi Conference.

43. Miss ABU LUGHOD (Observer, Palestine Liberation Organization) said that the item before the Committee was of particular concern to her delegation because, in Palestine, it was the women who had suffered most from the Israeli occupation. The situation of Palestinian women had deteriorated in the 35 years since the creation of the Zionist State, to the point where it they could only be compared to that of women in South Africa and Namibia. The Israeli occupation authorities, particularly in such fields as health education and employment which affected women directly, had made living conditions for the Palestinian people impossible in order to force them to emigrate.

44. The fact that the Palestinian people were not free to determine the allocation and planning of financial resources in the health field explained why the infant mortality rate in the occupied territories in 1981 had been nearly 30 per 1,000 and why the population of the occupied territories had suffered from epidemics of diphtheria, poliomyelitis and measles, as reported by WHO in document A/35/16. Access of the Palestinian population to education, to which Palestinians attached particular importance, was extremely difficult because of the constant harassment of students, overcrowded classrooms, lack of books and the absence of schools in certain villages. Palestinian women, being obliged to help to provide for the needs of their households, constituted a pool of cheap labour for Israeli industry, and their working conditions were often deplorable.

45. Despite all those obstacles, Palestinian women had shown admirable courage in their fight for liberation and justice. The Women's Work Committee in the West Bank had grown tremendously in the past five years and local committees had been formed in camps and villages, where women were taught to defend their political and economic rights and to preserve their national identity. Palestinian women had established daycare centres, fought for the right to conduct trade union activities, created co-operatives, given literacy classes, set up embroidery workshops and vocational centres and even, in the summer of 1983, published a 64-page document entitled "The Voice of Woman", containing essays and interviews, the distribution of which had been banned by the Israeli authorities.

46. There were more than one thousand Palestinian women in Israeli prisons, where they were subjected to all kinds of mistreatment. One of them, Mariam Abdel Jalil, had been arrested on 1 November 1982 and subjected to brutal interrogations with the result that, on leaving prison, had been a mere shadow of her former self. As long as there were such situations as those, her delegation would find it difficult to believe that the objectives of the Decade had been attained.

47. In the years following the 1980 Copenhagen Conference, her delegation had repeatedly declared that the situation of Palestinian women and women living under apartheid was not entraneous to the issue of the status of women in general. Many

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(Miss Abu Lughod, PLU)

delegations had supported that view and the International Conference on the Question of Palestine, held at Geneva from 29 August to 7 September, had urged the Preparatory Committee of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women to include that item on the agenda of the Conference. Likewise, the Latin American regional preparatory meeting had taken note of the need for a study on the conditions of women and children in the occupied territories. Such a study was all the more necessary in view of the fact that the situation in the occupied territories had significantly deteriorated since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Her delegation, for its part, would ensure that a "national" report was submitted to the Conference despite the difficulties it might encounter from the Zionist authorities.

48. Shortly before the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women had approved two projects for Palestinian and Lebanese women in southern Lebanon. Although the Israeli occupation had made it impossible to implement those projects, her delegation wished to thank the Voluntary Fund for its efforts.

49. Mr. RAJAIE-KHORASSANI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation had carefully studied the statement submitted by the Secretary-General on the administrative and financial implications of the recommendations of the Commission on the Status of Women (A/C.3/38/2/Add.1). While recognizing the positive elements in the Commission's recommendations, his delegation considered that, because they had concentrated on such issues as equality, development, peace, employment, education and health, those recommendations had shown a lack of in-depth understanding of the real problems of women. For historical reasons, equality was an issue of concern primarily to the women of Western countries. Development and peace were the concern of society as a whole, and there was nothing particularly feminine about them. Employment was a world wide problem, and affected men no less than women. On the contrary, the great majority of women in the world of today were not unemployed but that did not mean that they were jobless, in view of their most noble and most constructive responsibility as housewives and mothers. Health and education too were as important to men as they were to women. He did not see why, on page 3 of document A/C.3/38/2/Add.1, it was requested that special attention should be paid to the situation of rural women, as if the problems that arose in rural societies affected women more than men. The Islamic Republic of Iran, like many other Moslem countries, questioned the exclusively materialistic criteria, devoid of all reference to religious values, used by the United Nations to evaluate the situation of women. Such goals as health, education and employment were no doubt very important, but they could not by any means constitute the highest ideal with regard to the rights of women, nor should they become the greatest concern of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women.

50. It was unworthy of the Commission on the Status of Women to ignore the fact that, in some societies, the educational system aimed at encouraging prostitution, homosexuality and lesbianism and heresy. The Commission should also know that delinquency in all its forms, sex crimes and murders were due not to illiteracy,

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(Mr. Rajale-Khorassani, Islamic
Republic of Iran)

lack of social services or lack of equality in the Western sense, but to the demise of morality in human relations. It was therefore strange, to say the least, that the United Nations should be so concerned for women in the rural areas of the third world while it tolerated on its doorstep, in the streets of New York, the most immoral and degrading practices. Morality had no other source than religious faith, and that was unfortunately entirely absent from the Charter of the United Nations and from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

51. A recent television programme entitled "Slavery in the United States" had told how American soldiers and diplomats had brought Korean girls to the United States to work in the country's houses of prostitution; such inhuman practices must be deplored. He proposed that the Committee should unanimously adopt a resolution asking all Member States to declare prostitution illegal and punishable and to take all necessary measures to eliminate it.

52. Mr. BEIN (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Iraq had slyly inserted in their statements slanderous accusations about the status of Arab women in Israel. How did those representatives dare speak about Palestinian women at a time when Syrian, Libyan and Iranian forces were attacking the Palestinian camps of Naher el Bared and Beddaoui as well as the city of Tripoli where civilians, including, of course, many hundreds of women, were being subjected to indiscriminate shelling that had been condemned by the International Committee of the Red Cross?

53. A brief comparison of the current status of Arab women in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Syria and Iraq with that of Arab women in Israel and in the areas administered by Israel was sufficient to demonstrate the absurdity of those slanderous accusations. The United Nations Demographic Yearbook, report No. 27 of the Minority Rights Group and the United Nations Compendium of Social Statistics indicated that, in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, less than 1,000 women attended university, and that 97.4 per cent of Libyan women, 80 per cent of Syrian women and 86 per cent of Iraqi women were illiterate and had had no schooling at all. The corresponding figure for Arab women in Israel had fallen from 85 per cent in 1948 to 29.6 per cent today. Prior to 1967, in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza district, 53 per cent of all Arab women had had no schooling; by 1981, that figure had fallen to 32 per cent. Since it was difficult to imagine that those oil-rich countries were short of cash, the real reason behind their incredibly limited efforts on behalf of Arab women could be found only in the basic attitude of their Governments towards the female sex.

54. Moreover, according to ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1979 and the United Nations Compendium of Social Statistics, only 3 per cent of all adult Libyan women, 8.6 per cent of all adult Syrian women, and 2.3 per cent of all Iraqi women were economically active. The majority of women in those countries were active only in child-bearing and in the kitchen. In comparison, more than 36 per cent of the women in Israel were economically active and participated in the national development of the Zionist State of Israel. Moreover, the United Nations

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(Mr. Bein, Israel)

Demographic Yearbook, 1980 indicated that the life expectancy of Libyan women was 57 years, of Syrian women 65 years, and of Iraqi women 56.7 years. An Arab woman living in Israel, however, could expect to live at least 10 years longer, since her life expectancy was 75 years.

55. He supposed that, in exercising their right of reply, the States he had just mentioned would once again call the Zionist State of Israel an "entity" and talk about diverting attention. He would, however, challenge them to address the substance of the matter and to tell the Committee how their Governments planned to make real improvements in the extremely disadvantaged status of women in their countries.

56. Mr. AL-HADDAWI (Iraq) said that his delegation would not deign to reply to the lies that had just been uttered by the representative of the Zionist and Fascist entity.

57. Mr. ARNOUSS (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the members of the Committee knew all about the activities and practices of Israel. With respect to the position of Palestinian women in the occupied Arab territories, he would simply draw attention to a statement on that subject by an Israeli writer, who had said that the Israelis had been transformed into a band of killers of women, old people and the innocent, had robbed an entire people of its property and had sacrificed the idea of sanctity.

58. Mr. SERJINA (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) rejected the slanderous remarks of the representative of the Zionist entity and invited him to refer to the report prepared by the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya on economic and social rights, which reflected the progress of Libyan women in all areas. The persistence of daily violations of human rights in Palestine and the occupied Arab territories, the daily crimes referred to by many delegations, the expulsion of an entire people by Nazi and Fascist forces, the massacres at Sabra and Shatila, all those crimes were irrefutable proof of the terrorism engaged in by the Zionist bands.

The meeting was suspended at 5.43 p.m. and resumed at 5.45 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 100: ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES AND WAYS AND MEANS WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS (A/38/203, A/38/325, A/38/529)

- (a) STUDY ON INTERNATIONAL CONDITIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/38/511)
- (b) NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/38/416)

59. Mr. BUFFUM (Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs), introducing agenda item 100, said it was worth recalling that the General Assembly had repeatedly stressed the interdependence and the indivisibility of all human rights, civil and political, and economic, social and cultural. It was therefore most appropriate that the Committee should consider the item with high priority each year.

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(Mr. Buffum)

60. While it was important to have long-term objectives, the urgency of the matter demanded immediate action. Persons facing summary execution, protracted imprisonment on political grounds, torture or hunger and discrimination required the immediate attention of the international community. The views of the Secretary-General on human rights set forth in document A/38/511, which was before the Committee, might be usefully used as a guide towards striking a balance between long-term and immediate objectives. The Secretary-General had stressed the need to protect the right to life, the most basic of all rights: he had spoken out against racial discrimination, drawn attention to assaults on fundamental human rights during periods of emergency, and had urged that greater importance should be attached to promotional and educational activities in the field of human rights.

61. The Committee would also consider a report on national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (A/38/416). The contents and consideration of the reports already submitted on the subject should now lead to practical action to encourage and carry out tangible and constructive measures at the national and local levels. The ways in which international co-operation could assist national and local institutions to increase their contributions in the future should also be considered. More frequent exchanges of experience among such institutions, for example, among national human rights commissions, might be encouraged.

62. He hoped that, during the discussion on the item, the Committee not only would consider general questions such as the current international situation and its impact on human rights, but would attempt to develop more effective methods of addressing specific problems, some of which were very important, such as the right to life and abuses of human rights during states of emergency.

63. The Secretary-General and the Secretariat fully shared the desire of members of the Committee to find the most effective ways and means of assuring the full and universal enjoyment of human rights.

64. Mr. OGURTSOV (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) asked the Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs which Secretariat services had prepared reports A/38/511 and A/38/416, which were before the Committee under the agenda item that he had just introduced.

65. Mr. BUFFUM (Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs) said that those reports had been prepared by the Centre for Human Rights at Geneva, the Director of which would attend the discussion in the Committee later in the session.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.