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at 10.30 a.m.  
New York

## SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 27th MEETING

Chairman: Mrs. MAIR (Jamaica)

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REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 85: UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN: EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE: REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/32/3, chap. VI, sect. B, A/32/174, A/32/175, A/32/211, A/32/216 and Corr.1, A/32/218 and Add.1, A/32/269)

1. Miss HENDERSON (Fiji) stated that in her country, which was multiracial, the respective roles of men and women varied considerably according to culture and traditions. Over the past decade, her Government had introduced legal and administrative measures designed to afford women the same opportunities as men in the task of nation-building. The Constitution guaranteed fundamental human rights to all. Women were guaranteed equal rights with men in the political field - at both the national and local levels - as well as in education and marriage. They were protected against exploitation and in employment. The Government allowed women employees three months' maternity leave with full pay and hoped that other employers would follow suit.

2. Her Government had acceded to the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children (1921), the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1953) and the Convention on the Nationality of Women (1957). It encouraged women's voluntary organizations in both urban and rural areas, with a view to enabling women to discuss community problems, especially those affecting the family. Although more successful in urban areas, those activities were also beginning to bear fruit among rural women, who were forming co-operative associations to run small businesses as well as to fill an auxiliary role in education.

3. Notwithstanding those constitutional and legal safeguards, the integration of women into society in her country still left much to be desired. The movement for the liberation of women was essentially a Western phenomenon but was now gathering momentum in most developing countries. The material successes of industrialized countries had, however, been accompanied by negative factors which were dehumanizing mankind. The importance of the family as a unit of society was diminishing. The question arose as to whether the developing world really needed that type of progress. That question was fundamental to the participation of women in all activities. Her country's experience had shown that a sudden breakdown of cultural ties created difficult social problems and any demand for change in the traditional pattern of life was therefore carefully scrutinized. In her country's view, education was the most effective instrument for change.

4. An island developing country like her own must increase opportunities not only for women but for all its citizens. Fiji had accordingly drawn up rural and urban development programmes, but because of the country's limited resources they had to be focused principally on providing the basic necessities of existence. Some of the minimum targets set for development in the World Plan of Action must therefore be accorded a low priority in Fiji. Those included development of modern rural technology, cottage industries, pre-school day-care centres, and time- and energy-saving resources for women.

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(Miss Henderson, Fiji)

5. The World Plan of Action and the Programme for the Decade for Women, the draft Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the work of the Committee and of the Commission on the Status of Women not only provided useful guidelines but also represented positive steps towards achieving the equality of women. Fiji might be slow to implement the specific measures outlined, but that would not prevent her delegation from expressing full support for them.
6. Her delegation agreed that the mandate of the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women should be to advise the Secretary-General on the screening, appraisal and selection of projects to be funded and the amounts to be allocated. The Fund should, however, develop policies and standards of its own and not duplicate the operations of existing United Nations funds. In the formulation of projects to be supported by the Fund, her delegation would advocate the "grass roots" approach, in which the regional commissions were expected to play a major technical-assistance role. Her delegation saw some discrepancy between the priorities for the allocation of funds to the regional commissions laid down in General Assembly resolution 31/113 and those in paragraph 21 of document A/32/174. The former had stressed least developed, land-locked and island developing countries as priority areas. Document A/32/174, however, referred only to population of the region, number of countries in each region and cost and content of project proposals as representing the determining factors for allocation of funds.
7. Mr. CANTAVE (Haiti) said it must be recognized that in the various fields of human activity many women had shown themselves to be just as capable as men and they had been just as brave as men in the struggle for equality, justice and social progress.
8. In the legal system of Haiti, women had exactly the same rights and duties as men, except with regard to the matrimonial régime. It was open to both sexes to hold any government post. For example, the Assistant Secretary of State in the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare was a woman. There were a number of women members of Parliament and women held high positions in all the ministries. In the Police Department, a woman was in charge of investigations. There was no discrimination in the universities and in consequence women became doctors, lawyers and agronomists. Haitian women were also ready to bear arms in case of need, like their women forebears in the struggle for liberation in 1804.
9. His delegation hoped that the initiative represented by the draft Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women would throw light on the status of women throughout the world and would lead to the removal of discrimination against women in countries where it still existed.
10. He considered that, before the World Conference was held in 1980, the United Nations should establish a special commission to inquire into the situation of women in all Member States. His delegation would support all proposals favouring women and was confident that the members of the Committee would support the drafts concerning women's emancipation and their progress in every area of human activity.

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11. Mrs. CHATER (Tunisia) said that most of her ideas concerning the draft Convention had already been expressed by earlier speakers. She was delighted to see that the Committee was close to adopting the draft. The text was well balanced and covered all fields of interest to women, whether relating to the family or to work. It was fully consistent with Tunisian legislation, which stipulated that women should have the same rights as men. For example, Tunisian women had virtually the same rights as men with regard to marriage; polygamy was prohibited, as was divorce by unilateral rejection. Family-planning programmes were aimed at the well-being of the family and the emancipation of women. Children were the responsibility of both parents; guardianship in the event of divorce was decided by the judge. Under a law of 1956 women had the right to dispose of their property. There were a number of other statutes aimed at safeguarding the legitimate rights of women and promoting equality of the sexes. Women enjoyed equality in the field of education and employment; there were no restrictions on women's right to work in any sector; salaries were identical for men and women. Tunisia had recently ratified ILO Convention No. 100 concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value.

12. Some points in the draft Convention could be improved and her delegation would deal with those in the Working Group. Adoption of the draft would be only a single step which could not of itself eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. Inequality continued to exist notwithstanding. Even in countries where great efforts had been made to establish equality, much remained to be done. Tradition could not be wiped out with a stroke of the pen. Women must be made aware of their rights and could not do so if they remained illiterate or continued to be burdened by repeated pregnancies.

13. She expressed the hope that the United Nations Decade for Women would benefit fully from the implementation of an integrated programme. While much had been done since 1975 to publicize the question of the status of women, further action was necessary; in particular, women must be helped to undertake research and study and they must work for the adoption of legislation taking account of the Convention. Supplementary training and education programmes for women aimed at their full-fledged integration into society would promote the progress of society as a whole, for women represented half of the population.

14. Mrs. AHMED (Somalia) said that her Government refused to permit discrimination on the basis of sex; in both the political and social fields women were on an equal footing with men. Since the attainment of independence, all fields of work had been open to women, who also had full rights as women and mothers. Women were members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party and enjoyed equal standing with men in all areas of activity and society. Her Government continued to provide the means to ensure progress in all fields; it was currently working to promote greater awareness of the rights of women, particularly in rural areas, and was laying greater stress on the role of women in education. Women should be helped to care for their children and to benefit from the programmes for their education and training. They should be enabled to work outside the home as well as to care for their families.

15. Mr. MESSING-MIERZEJEWSKI (Chief, Representation and Liaison Unit, Office for Inter-Agency Affairs and Co-ordination) stated that, at the request of delegations, his office would endeavour, during the second phase of the debate, in November, to submit a comprehensive picture of the activities undertaken by the specialized agencies in connexion with the United Nations Decade for Women. Senior officials might address the Committee on behalf of certain of the agencies.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.