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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Twenty-sixth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 639th MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Friday, 17 September 1976, at 3.15 p.m.

Chairman:

Mrs. GONZALEZ de CUADROS

(Colombia)

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THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN: EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE,  
1976-1985 (agenda item 4) (continued):

- (a) EVALUATION OF ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN DURING THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR  
(E/CN.6/593)
- (b) THE PROGRAMME FOR THE DECADE AND RELATED QUESTIONS INCLUDING TECHNICAL  
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- (c) REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF PROGRESS MADE UNDER THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
STRATEGY FOR THE SECOND UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT DECADE AND IN THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE WORLD PLAN OF ACTION (E/CN.6/596 and Add.1 and 2, 599)
- (d) PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE 1980 CONFERENCE (E/CN.6/600; E/CN.6/NGO/258)

1. Mrs. MAKA (Guinea) said that the complete emancipation of women, as indeed of all the most oppressed sections of society, had always been among the prime goals of the Democratic Party of Guinea. Conscious of that fact, women had fought side by side with men within the ranks of the Party for the country's liberation and, after the achievement of independence, continued to fulfil their historic role in the construction of a new society. Women in Guinea enjoyed full equality with men in matters of marriage, employment and political rights; they also shared men's obligations towards society, and were fully integrated in the overall development effort. Moreover, special centres for the advancement of women had been set up throughout the country to provide technical training facilities. Guinean women also contributed fully to the cause of peace and the development of international relations and participated actively in the work of international women's organizations and in the struggle against colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism and apartheid.

2. During the United Nations Decade for Women, the women of Guinea were determined to continue and intensify the struggle to improve the working and living conditions of women in rural areas, assure the integration of women on an equal footing with men in all the new institutions created by the Party-State, systematically pursue the mass literacy campaign, promote the education of youth at all stages, and take an active part in the campaign against juvenile delinquency. A further objective was to improve the technical and technological methods used at the centres for the advancement of women with a view to raising women's qualifications and their labour productivity.

3. Mrs. COENE (Belgium) said that a new law on matrimonial reform, establishing complete equality of the spouses, had been promulgated that very day in her country's Official Gazette. Details of the new law, which had been given high priority as a direct result of the International Women's Year, would be supplied in a report that her delegation would shortly submit to the Commission.

4. In continuing the efforts of the International Women's Year over the forthcoming Decade, the Belgian Government intended to concentrate its attention on the most disadvantaged women in rural areas and in the towns. A new government department for women's affairs, created during the year, was now a permanent feature of the Ministry of Culture. In addition, two permanent consultative Commissions had been

set up, one dealing with the question of women's employment and the other on the status of women in general. A number of initiatives proposed by the former of those two Commissions, in particular as regards the recognition of the social value of motherhood, had been adopted by the European Economic Community. The second Commission, composed of representatives of the principal women's movements and of relevant ministries, was entrusted with the task of examining existing international instruments in the field of women's rights and of proposing new initiatives. A working group within the Commission was concerned with the integration of women in the development process, more particularly in the bilateral aid sector, and another aspect of the Commission's work was the study and eventual eradication of discrimination against girls in education.

5. Mrs. STABILE de MACHINANDIARENA (Observer for Argentina), speaking at the Chairman's invitation, said that her country had taken an active part in the International Women's Year. It was therefore regrettable that document E/CN.6/593 contained no information on Argentina's activities, even though a report on the subject had been duly submitted as early as 15 May 1976.

6. A national commission for the Year had been created, a working group set up under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and a special liaison officer appointed to maintain contact with United Nations Headquarters. One of Argentina's major contributions to the International Women's Year had been the holding of a regional seminar on the participation of women in economic, social and political development, co-sponsored by the United Nations and supported by the Inter-American Commission of Women. A large number of conferences and other events had also been organized by more than 150 women's non-governmental organizations, many of them in consultative status with the United Nations, and an offer had been made to provide the headquarters for a multinational women's centre to be set up under the auspices of the Inter-American Commission of Women. Follow-up activities connected with the Year included the holding of a national seminar on women in management in Buenos Aires from 20 to 23 June 1976. Generally speaking, the situation as regards equality between the sexes in Argentina was highly satisfactory. In most cases, domestic legislation in that field had been adopted well in advance of the corresponding international instruments.

7. Ms. SANDLUND (Sweden) noted that paragraph 22 of document E/CN.6/594 mentioned an ad hoc interagency meeting scheduled at Geneva from 1-8 September 1976. Her delegation looked forward to receiving a report on the meeting, and hoped it would contain proposals for the practical realization of the 10 stated principal objectives with regard to the integration of women in development. As regards the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women (section II.E of document E/CN.6/594), she said that her delegation strongly believed that projects concerning women should form an integral part of the regular activities of all United Nations bodies, and therefore opposed, as a matter of principle, the creation of new institutions and funds concerned only with women, not least because there was a serious risk of such institutions and funds being allocated very scant resources. Sweden's position in the matter was fully in line with the principles laid down in the World Plan of Action and General Assembly resolution 3520 (XXX).

8. Among the six main areas of activity listed in paragraph 49 of document E/CN.6/594, her delegation favoured points (ii), (v) and (vi), and also felt that part of the Voluntary Fund should be used to finance the preparatory work for the 1980 Conference.
9. Turning to section II.F of document E/CN.6/594, she said it was most important that the Secretariat unit responsible for women's questions should be assigned more staff and budgetary resources under the United Nations regular budget. In conclusion, referring to section III.B.1 of the document, she remarked that, although several of the studies mentioned were of great importance in the preparation of the necessary basis for specific development projects, statistics in many countries were highly inadequate. For example, women in agriculture and self-employed women handicraft workers and other home industry workers were not included in the statistics on the economically active population. In view of such obvious lack of adequate statistical data, her delegation suggested that the Secretariat should be asked to prepare a proposal, which the Commission might submit to the Economic and Social Council, recommending that the Statistical Commission at its forthcoming session in November 1976 should consider the relevant paragraphs in the World Plan of Action.
10. Ms. FREDERICK (United States of America) recalled that, at a previous meeting, she had suggested the establishment of a number of small informal groups to consider possible courses of action under agenda sub-items 4 (b), (c) and (d). The proposed groups would not be formal sub-committees but would merely provide an opportunity for exchanges of information and opinions, thus preparing the ground for a full discussion by the Commission in plenary.
11. Mr. EHSASSI (Iran), noting that the revised United States proposal would expedite the Commission's work, said that the working group's meetings should be flexible, with adequate representation of various geographical groups. A point which would have to be clarified was whether, in view of the limited time available, the groups should consider only a list of priority questions, leaving the remainder for the plenary.
12. Mrs. TALLAWY (Egypt) said she would find it difficult to endorse the establishment of four working groups and felt it might be preferable to set up a single working group to consider the four sub-items in succession. The working group should, in her view, be guided by the discussions in the Commission and should submit a draft resolution reflecting the various views expressed. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that item 4 implied two main tasks: evaluation and planning. The evaluation necessary under sub-items 4 (a) and (c) could be effected in the form of a general draft resolution; that under sub-items 4 (b) and (d) would require much detailed consideration.
13. Mrs. HIRLEMANN (France) opposed the establishment of four working groups as impracticable.
14. Miss GONZALEZ MARTINEZ (Mexico) said that the documents submitted by the Secretariat provided a sound basis for the Commission's deliberations. The Commission now had to plan an effective programme for the Decade so that it would be of practical benefit to women the world over. The programme suggested by the Secretariat in document E/CN.6/594, and specifically in section II.B, was of particular interest to her delegation. As noted in paragraph 22, an ad hoc interagency meeting had been held in February 1976 and

had reached agreement on ten principal objectives for a joint interagency programme; it would be useful to know the results of the further interagency meeting on the question held at Geneva from 1 to 8 September.

15. Her delegation considered the establishment of an International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, referred to in section II.C., to be particularly important. Her Government was already holding consultations with various organizations which might participate in the activities of the Institute and was considering the possibility of making a small financial contribution to its organization.

16. The Voluntary Fund referred to in section II.E. must be used to promote activities for the advancement of women, especially in the developing countries, and of the various activities suggested for financing by the Fund, her delegation favoured the strengthening of regional programmes and research. It had reservations with respect to activities by non-governmental organizations; assistance should be given first to those Governments that requested it, and any resources that remained could then be allocated to non-governmental organizations. That did not mean that her delegation opposed the activities of non-governmental organizations but considered that some of those organizations enjoyed considerable financial support. The resources for secretariat activities should be appropriated under the regular budget of the United Nations.

17. In her view, the Commission should now proceed to consider those matters on which it was expected to make practical recommendations, and in particular the programme suggested in section III.

18. Mrs. SIPIILA (Assistant Secretary-General, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs) reported that the ad hoc interagency meeting held at Geneva from 1 to 8 September 1976 had been extremely successful. As could be seen from document E/CN.6/594/Add.1, which had just been issued, the ten principal objectives for a joint interagency programme had been reduced to nine. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3520 (XXX), the programme would be submitted to the Council during the first half of the Decade. A report on the most recent ad hoc meeting would be submitted to the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), which alone could decide what further action should be taken.

19. Mrs. BRUCE (Assistant Director, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs) explained that the principal objectives referred to in document E/CN.6/594/Add.1 constituted the framework of the activities planned by the specialized agencies. The number of objectives had been reduced to nine for practical reasons, several organizations having stated that they would have difficulty in dividing their activities in the manner originally suggested; the order in which the objectives were listed did not constitute an order of priority. It would be noted that the title of the interagency programme had been amended and a time-table for action drawn up. The recommendations referred to in paragraph 8 were important, and would be made known to the Commission when action on them had been taken by ACC.

20. Miss TYABJI (India) pointed out that the recommendations contained in document E/CN.6/594 were of a general nature, and that it was for the Commission to give them practical form. For that purpose, a working group or groups should be established.

21. Mrs. NIKOLAEVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) opposed the establishment of four working groups. The draft programme proposed in paragraph 58 should be considered by the Commission as a whole.

22. Mrs. BRUCE (Assistant Director, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs) pointed out that the objectives listed in document E/CN.6/594/Add.1 did not correspond to the objectives of the programme for the Decade; they simply constituted the basis for an inventory of activities in the United Nations system.

23. The mandates of the Conference were clear in the case of some of the programmes outlined in document E/CN.6/594, paragraph 58; others, particularly those in section B.2 (a)-(e) and section B.3, required clarification by the Commission.

24. Ms. SNYDER (Observer for the Economic Commission for Africa), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said that during the International Women's Year, a Training and Research Centre for Women had been established in accordance with resolution 269 (XII) of the Conference of Ministers of the Economic Commission for Africa. That resolution had also focused attention on the situation of women in rural areas and on the need for national machinery to provide support for women working for the development of their countries. The activities of the Centre, which was now providing assistance to women in the 47 member States of the Economic Commission for Africa, included training courses for rural trainers, in which information was provided on food storage and preservation methods and the development of rural technologies, and the organization of seminars on the establishment of national machinery and consultancy services, which would assist women in planning future activities. In that connexion, she noted that ECA greatly appreciated the valuable expertise of FAO, UNFPA and UNICEF. It was also working in very close co-operation with non-governmental organizations and bilateral donors.

25. In 1977, ECA would hold a regional conference, in co-operation with the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, to assess the progress made in implementing the World Plan of Action and to discuss the place of women in the new international economic order. Future research to be carried out by ECA would be concerned with the development of indicators, including means of assessing the value of peasant labour, with village technologies and some of the legal aspects of the problems of rural women. Lastly, ECA was making special efforts to promote technical assistance between the countries of the region. It had drawn up a list of consultants who provided technical assistance in various countries, and had established a volunteer corps, called the "Women's Development Task Force", for which ECA acted as a sort of middleman by recruiting volunteers and paying for some of their expenses in the countries to which they were sent.

26. Mr. GRACIARENA (Observer for the Economic Commission for Latin America), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said that the Commission, at its fifteenth session held at Quito in 1973, had adopted resolution 321 (XV) requesting the ECLA secretariat to prepare a study on the participation of women in the development of the region and the measures to be taken to eliminate discrimination and the lack of educational, employment and economic opportunities for women. To that end, ECLA had held regional meetings in various countries of the region in co-operation with the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. For example, the meeting held at Caracas in 1975 had recommended that the ECLA secretariat should organize a regional conference and draw up a regional plan of action which would take account of the particular situation of women in the ECLA region and be designed to implement the World Plan of Action adopted at the World Conference. The Caracas meeting had also prepared a report entitled "Women of Latin America", which had been circulated by ECLA to all the countries of the region.

27. After the World Conference of the International Women's Year, ECLA had co-operated with the United Nations Secretariat in organizing a seminar at Buenos Aires in March 1976, at which it had been recommended that the ECIA secretariat should convene an advisory group to establish guidelines for the regional plan of action. Activities connected with the elaboration of that plan included the setting up of a working group responsible for the preparation of documents and the establishment of a time-table of activities relating to the integration of women in development. The Government of Cuba would act as host to the regional conference in March 1977.

28. In addition, ECLA was carrying out statistical research on subjects of interest to women, such as income distribution, salaries, education, social and rural change, poverty and demography in the ECIA region.

29. Ms. OLSON (Observer for the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said that more than one half of the world's population lived in the ESCAP region, and of that total half at least were women who devoted 40 per cent of their time to agricultural activities. ESCAP was increasingly aware of the problems faced by men and women in the region and hoped to strengthen inter-regional co-operation with ECA and ECLA in order to solve them.

30. ESCAP had drawn up an Asian Plan for the Integration of Women in the Development Process, in accordance with resolution 157 (XXXI) adopted at the Commission's thirty-first session held at New Delhi in 1975. ESCAP had also accepted the Iranian Government's offer to establish a centre in Iran which would become part of the ESCAP family; the centre would be in Teheran and would be known as the Asian and Pacific Centre for Women and Development.

31. Commission resolution 157 (XXXI) had further requested the ESCAP secretariat to implement the Asian Plan and to seek the necessary financial and staff resources. Accordingly, the project for the Asian Plan had been formulated by a consultant appointed in November 1975 with the support of UNDP; it placed special emphasis on the status of women in rural areas and would be submitted to the thirty-third session of the ESCAP Commission to be held in Bangkok in 1977.

32. One of ESCAP's highest priorities was integrated rural development. In that connexion, she noted that the Asian Plan project had shown that rural women accounted for two thirds of the female population in the Asian and Pacific region, and that many women held four or five jobs concurrently. The study for the project had also revealed that the ministries responsible for industry, co-operation and land reform in the region were still not giving sufficient attention to the integration of women in the development process. The immediate objectives of the five-year action programme to be undertaken as part of the Asian Plan therefore included the adoption of legislation relating to women, the improvement of education, employment and training opportunities, the establishment of a corps of skilled women volunteers and workers from non-governmental organizations and Governments to assist rural women, the development of low-cost technology to free women from unnecessary drudgery, and the establishment of effective rural social services for health education, nutrition, family planning, child-care and social welfare. The proposed action programme covered the period from 1977 to 1981, and would be submitted for approval to ESCAP's thirty-third session. The most serious obstacle to the implementation of the action programme was that of financing, and ESCAP would appreciate any assistance and information which countries and regions could provide.

33. Mrs. ALLENSPACH (Observer for the International Federation of Business and Professional Women), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said that the Federation's main objective was to improve the status of women in the political, cultural and social life of their countries. To that end, it had organized many regional seminars, workshops and panel discussions during the International Women's Year. Its activities, which were described in documents E/CN.6/NGO/258 and 261, had included the organization of an all-African Seminar on the basic education and instruction of rural women and a Seminar on women in times of business recession, which had recently been held in Switzerland.

34. The Federation had also undertaken an international research project entitled "Search Parties" to identify obstacles to the full participation of women in the life of their communities. It had circulated a summary of the World Plan of Action entitled "Words into Action", which called upon members of the Federation to take appropriate action to implement the recommendations adopted during the International Women's Year. Under the theme "The Challenge to the New Woman in Agriculture, Industry and Family, 1977-1980", it had urged the adoption of action programmes designed to deal with the problems of rural women and to study the position of women in the context of industrialization and the changing role of women in the modern family. Since there was a gap between legislation aimed at ensuring equality and the actual status of women in many countries, developed and developing alike, the Federation had requested its affiliates to call upon their Governments to work for the full integration of women in society and to promote the full partnership of men and women. It also encouraged its members to accept responsibility at the local and national levels so that larger numbers of adequately trained women could assume policy-making positions in Government and in governmental bodies.

35. After a procedural discussion on the United States representative's proposal for the establishment of a working group, the CHAIRMAN suggested that a decision on the matter should be taken at a subsequent meeting.

36. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.