



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



UN LITZENT

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.6/SR.641
21 September 1976

Original: ENGLISH

OUT 13 1976

UN/SA COLLECTION

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Twenty-sixth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 641st MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 20 September 1976, at 3.10 p.m.

Chairman: Mrs. GONZALEZ de CUADROS (Colombia)

CONTENTS

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;
- (b) The programme for the Decade and related questions including technical co-operation activities;
- (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;
- (d) Preparatory work for the 1980 conference.

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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, E/CN.6/NGO/261)
- (b) THE PROGRAMME FOR THE DECADE AND RELATED QUESTIONS INCLUDING TECHNICAL
CO-OPERATION ACTIVITIES (E/CN.6/594 and Corr. 1, E/CN.6/594/Add.1, 595, 596,
597, 603 and 604; E/CN.6/NGO/261)
- (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.6/598 and Add.1 and 2, 599)
- (d) PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE 1980 CONFERENCE (E/CN.6/600; E/CN.6/NGO/258)

1. Mrs. PEÑALVER de LEPAGE (Venezuela) expressed regret that the documents relating to the important item under consideration had not been distributed earlier and that they did not mention her Government's comments, supplied at the Secretary-General's request.

2. In her delegation's view, women's integration in the development process was indispensable and imperative, and one of the most effective ways of achieving it was to press for the establishment of the new world economic order, one of whose component elements was the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States. On the occasion of the International Women's Year, a presidential commission had been set up in her country to evaluate the legal, economic and social status of women, to study and co-ordinate the restructuring and centralization of existing services and projects for women, and to draw up standards for the planning and execution of various programmes in that field at the national level. The first Venezuelan congress of women, attended by more than 2,000 delegates representing all political parties and social and trade union organizations, had been organized under the commission's auspices. Five parliamentary bills aimed at improving the status of women in Venezuela, drafted by the commission, were at present under consideration.

3. Mrs. COCKCROFT (United Kingdom) suggested that the general discussion should be closed and that the Commission should proceed to the detailed consideration of part III of document E/CN.6/594.

4. Mr. EHSASSI (Iran) proposed the immediate establishment of a drafting group to examine agenda item 4 (b) with a view to making practical proposals to the plenary.

5. After a procedural discussion in which Begum FARIDI (Pakistan), Mrs. NIKOLAEVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), Miss GONZALEZ MARTINEZ (Mexico), Mrs. COCKCROFT (United Kingdom), Mrs. DEVAUD (France), Mrs. BRUCE (Assistant Director, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs), Miss TYABJI (India) and Miss HERRAN (Colombia) took part, the CHAIRMAN suggested that the general debate should be considered closed and that the Commission should proceed to a discussion, section by section, of part III of document E/CN.6/594. A drafting group would be set up when all delegations had had an opportunity to express their views and make specific suggestions regarding the Programme for the Decade.

6. It was so agreed.

7. Mrs. SALYO (Indonesia) suggested that the comparative studies referred to in section A.3. (a) should deal with education and employment as well as with family law and that, when the study on the sharing of family responsibilities (section A.3. (b)) was embarked upon, account should be taken of differences in family structures in various areas of the world.

8. Mrs. COCKCROFT (United Kingdom) proposed the addition of a section A.3. (c) providing for a study on the social and economic evaluation of the work of the homemaker.

9. Mrs. DEVAUD (France) supported that proposal. With regard to section A.3. (a), she stressed the importance of elaborating regional standards before any attempt was made to draw up international ones.

10. Mrs. NIKOLAEVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) also supported the United Kingdom delegate's proposal and suggested that, in view of the study to be undertaken by the International Labour Organisation under ILO Recommendation No. 123 of 1965, section A.3. should also include a study on the question of women workers with family responsibilities. In her view, the order of priorities should be as follows:

- (a) study on the position of working women with family responsibilities;
- (b) comparative studies and elaboration of international standards on different aspects of family law;
- (c) study on the economic evaluation of the work of the homemaker;
- (d) study on the sharing of family responsibilities.

11. She did not personally have great faith in the usefulness of the last of those studies; the question of the sharing of family responsibilities would surely continue to be decided by individual families, and it might be wise not to interfere with their freedom of choice in the matter. However, as the issue was specifically mentioned in a General Assembly resolution, she was not proposing that the study should be excluded from the programme but merely that it should not be given top priority.

12. Miss TYABJI (India) suggested that a study on the position of the divorced woman and her responsibilities should be included in section A.3. (a).

13. Mrs. BRUCE (Assistant Director, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs) said that both the studies listed in section A.3. emanated from recommendations adopted in the past by the Commission itself. A programme of studies on different aspects of family law, including questions connected with divorce and with parental rights and duties, as well as on women's property rights, had been initiated in the 1960s and would have been completed by the present session had the Secretariat's efforts not been diverted in other directions by proposals contained in the World Plan of Action.

14. Ms. BOKOR-SZEGO (Hungary) pointed out that the draft agenda for the forthcoming UNESCO General Conference included an item on human rights with a sub-item on the rights of women. In her opinion, the Commission should express its satisfaction on that account, and declare its readiness to co-operate with UNESCO with a view to avoiding duplication of effort.
15. Mrs. JANJIC (International Labour Organisation), referring to the suggestion by the representative of Indonesia for the inclusion of a study on women in employment, said that the agency in the United Nations family responsible for employment questions was the International Labour Organisation, and that a parallel study in that field would involve unnecessary duplication. Similarly, with respect to the Soviet representative's suggestion for a study on women workers with family responsibilities, she pointed out that an ILO study on that subject would be undertaken in 1977 and submitted to the ILO Conference in 1978.
16. Mrs. SIPILA (Assistant Secretary-General, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs) said that both the ILO and UNESCO were active in areas very close to the Commission's sphere of competence and that there was, of course, no need for the Commission to conduct parallel studies in those fields. It should be borne in mind, however, that no United Nations body - except, to a limited extent, the Commission on Human Rights - was concerned with the status of men or women under civil law. In view of the discrimination to which women were still subjected in most countries as regards property and family rights, legal capacity, etc., there was a special need for action in those fields. Until the extent of discrimination against women throughout the world was fully realized, practical measures to eradicate it could not be taken, and most of the Commission's discussions would be in vain.
17. Mrs. NIKOLAEVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that, in making her suggestions, she had in no way wished to encroach upon the sphere of competence of the ILO or UNESCO but, rather, to encourage those organizations to carry on with the extremely useful work they were doing on behalf of women.
18. Mrs. SALYO (Indonesia) also explained that it had not been her intention to remove the studies she had proposed from the sphere of responsibility of the competent specialized agencies.
19. Miss GONZALEZ MARTINEZ (Mexico), referring to section A.2. (b), said that the participation of women in international co-operation and the strengthening of international peace should not only be subject to biennial review by the General Assembly and other relevant bodies, but should also be encouraged by seminars, conferences and other activities. Referring to section A.3. (b), she said that a study on the sharing of family responsibilities could be very useful in defining the respective roles of the parents in bringing up children and thereby improving the social and cultural position of women. Lastly, she wondered whether the public information activities referred to in section A.4. were wholly under the control of individual Governments or could be brought, at least partly, under international control. Further information by the Secretariat on the precise meaning of the proposal would be welcome.

20. Mr. EHSASSI (Iran) suggested that the word "populations" in section A.4. should be replaced by the word "women" in order to indicate that public information activities were designed to increase knowledge and awareness of the norms established and to make urban and rural women aware of their rights under the instruments in question.
21. Ms. SANDLUND (Sweden), referring to section A.3.(b), said that, as the ILO's study on the sharing of family responsibilities would be undertaken in 1977, it was extremely important that its work should be co-ordinated with that of the Commission.
22. Begum FARIDI (Pakistan), referring to the Iranian representative's suggestion, said she was of the opinion that the word "populations" in section A.4. should be replaced by the word "communities", because public information activities should be carried out through rural and urban community development efforts, and should involve the community as a whole.
23. Mrs. NIKOLAEVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) agreed with the representative of Pakistan that both men and women in the community should be made aware of the norms established and of their rights under international instruments relating to the status of women.
24. Mrs. BRUCE (Assistant Director, Centre for Official Development and Humanitarian Affairs) said that the programme for the Decade for Women was intended as a means of translating General Assembly resolutions and the recommendations of the World Conference into international and regional action. In preparing the programme, the Secretariat had had to work within the framework of the threefold theme of equality, development and peace. The theme of equality had seemed to be the one which was most closely related to international standards to eliminate discrimination on grounds of sex. Section A.4. of the programme was, for example, designed to increase awareness and understanding of the purpose of the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and other international instruments with related provisions. That paragraph also provided for public information activities to make people more aware of action which could be taken to implement those international standards. In that connexion, she drew attention to section B.3. of the programme, which gave a more complete outline of educational and informational activities designed to inform public opinion about the situation of women and to promote changes in attitudes towards women's roles in society. Non-governmental organizations could play a very important role in carrying out such activities at the national level.
25. Ms. FREDERICK (United States of America) said that section A.4. might be clearer if it was amended to read: "Information activities to increase public knowledge and awareness of the norms established and, especially, to make urban and rural women and men aware of their rights under these instruments".
26. Mrs. NIKOLAEVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said she did not think that the amendment suggested by the representative of the United States improved the wording of section A.4., which made it quite clear that one of the objectives of the programme was to increase knowledge and awareness of the standards established in international instruments relating to the status of women.

27. Princess PREM PURACHATRA (Thailand) suggested that the words "to make them aware of the duty to take responsibility for making full and proper use of those rights" should be added to the end of section A.4.

28. Mrs. ARRUA VALLEJO (Observer for the Inter-American Commission of Women), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman and introducing the report of the Inter-American Commission of Women contained in document E/CN.6/596, said that IACW was a regional intergovernmental organization composed of representatives of the members of the Organization of American States. Its main task was to mobilize women at all levels of society, and it had accordingly established co-operation committees composed of women's institutions representing all activities and professions.

29. She drew special attention to section I of document E/CN.6/596, which described IACW's activities during the International Women's Year. For example, IACW had established an ad hoc committee for studies to be carried out and recommendations to be made in connexion with the World Conference of the International Women's Year. That committee had studied current trends and changes in the legal and social status of women and men and the main obstacles to be overcome in achieving equality of rights, opportunities and responsibilities. It had also prepared a draft inter-American programme for the World Plan of Action which dealt mainly with the integration of women in the development process on an equal footing with men.

30. Section II of document E/CN.6/596 referred to the activities carried out by IACW to implement the programme for the United Nations Decade for Women. In that connexion, she noted that the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) had adopted resolution AG/Res.220/76(VI-O/76) relating to the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, 1976-1985. Moreover, IACW's eighteenth Assembly, held from 27 July to 5 August 1976 at Miami, Florida, had formulated the Regional Plan of Action for the Decade for Women in America, the text of which had been reproduced in annex I to document E/CN.6/596. She noted that one of the main objectives of the Regional Plan of Action was to promote the full participation of women in the development of their countries. To that end, IACW had established the Multinational Centre for Women, whose headquarters would be in Buenos Aires and whose purpose would be to provide support for IACW's training, research and information programmes relating to the problems of women.

31. Section III of document E/CN.6/596 described IACW's activities relating to the influence of the mass communication media on attitudes towards the roles of women and men in present-day society, a subject which would be taken up under item 5 of the Commission's agenda. In that connexion, she noted that IACW had organized the eleventh Training Course for Women Leaders at Santiago, Chile, from 8 to 18 March 1976.

32. Section IV of document E/CN.6/596 described the educational activities carried out by IACW from September 1973 to July 1976. They included training courses and seminars on various subjects such as Latin American integration and the integration of rural women in the development of their communities. Moreover, IACW had taken part in the United Nations Seminar on "The participation of women in economic, social

and political development and obstacles to their integration", which had been organized in Argentina in March 1976 in co-operation with ECLA as a follow-up to the World Conference of the International Women's Year. The agenda of that Seminar had been of particular interest to IACW because it had entailed discussions of national policies, priorities and programmes relating to the general development effort. The Seminar had also studied the World Plan of Action adopted by the United Nations with a view to determining which of its goals and objectives reflected the particular needs of the countries of the region.

33. Lastly, she said that, in June 1976, she had submitted IACW resolution No. 223 to the sixth General Assembly of OAS. That resolution had drawn the attention of the Governments of OAS member States to the importance of the work being carried out by IACW and to the need for OAS to contribute to its effectiveness by providing the necessary support and assistance.

34. Ms. HENDSCH (United States of America), referring to the IACW Observer's statement, said it was extremely useful for the organizations of the United Nations system to be informed of the work being carried out in the various regions with a view to the implementation of the programme for the Decade. Her delegation had also been glad to learn of the establishment of the Multinational Centre for Women at Buenos Aires, Argentina.

35. Ms. FREDERICK (United States of America) suggested the addition of the following activity as section B.1.(a)(iii): "Development of data base on women's socio-economic conditions for regular measurement of progress of women's integration into the development process". That activity was referred to in paragraph 166 of the World Plan of Action.

36. Mrs. GERLO-VAN LOEY (Belgium) observed that there was a certain lack of proportion between research and information-gathering activities and practical action as such. Greater importance should be given to programmes which would have an immediate impact on the living conditions of women throughout the world. In addition, section B.2. might well be modified to ensure that specific action was taken on General Assembly resolution 3523 (XXX) concerning women in rural areas.

37. The priorities established in document E/CN.6/594/Add.1 appeared to be perfectly acceptable.

38. Miss GONZALEZ-MARTINEZ (Mexico) said her delegation attached great importance to the establishment of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (section B.1.(a)(i)) and the co-ordination of the activities of the Institute with those of the United Nations system. The Institute required the support not only of the international organizations but also of Governments, and the Commission might assign to it as a priority task the compilation of economic and social information which would reflect the present situation of women.

39. Her delegation was particularly concerned about the situation of rural women, to whom attention should be devoted under section B.1. (b). Her delegation had in fact co-sponsored General Assembly resolution 3523 (XXX) which had authorized the study listed in section B.1. (b) (ii). In its view, an order of priorities should be established for the various studies referred to in section B.1. (b) (x). The activities listed under section B.2., and in particular B.2. (a), constituted an essential element of the programme for the Decade. In the principal objectives for the agencies indicated in document E/CN.6/594/Add.1, attention should have been concentrated on the improvement of the situation of women in rural and marginal urban areas. Account should also be taken of the need for women to have access to information on health, nutrition and social services.

40. The question of co-operation with and between the regional commissions was important to Mexico because ECLA was still working on a regional plan of action. In that connexion, the report of the Inter-American Commission of Women, which had adopted its own Regional Plan of Action, was very important. Greater attention should be given to women in rural areas because their living conditions were so backward and very few had technical skills. The programme in document E/CN.6/594 seemed to take insufficient account of the real situation and problems of women in Latin America, where 90 per cent of women had no training whatever. The activities suggested were extremely useful, but the Commission should take due account of what was being done by ECLA and make suggestions, in order to help it to give final form to the Regional Plan of Action. International co-operation was indeed a vital aspect of planning, especially for the developing countries.

41. Begum FARIDI (Pakistan), referring to the need for inter-sectoral planning at all levels, said it was important to associate competent women with the preparation of national and regional strategies and to establish a data base with the assistance of national clearing houses.

42. Miss TYABJI (India) proposed that socio-economic productive programmes for rural women should be added in section B.1. (b). Moreover, consideration should be given to the inclusion of practical programmes geared to the needs of a large number of developing countries in section B.2.

43. Mrs. NIKOLAEVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that due attention should be given to the new international economic order in the preparation of the programme for the Decade. She therefore proposed that a "study of the problem of the effect of foreign economic interests on the status of women" should be included in section B.1. (b), in accordance with paragraph 8 of the World Plan of Action, and assigned the highest priority. She then proposed the following order of priority for the other studies: the existing study (i) would become (ii), (iv) would become (iii), (xi) would become (iv), (ii) would become (v), (x) would become (vi), (iii) would become (vii), (vii) would become (viii), (viii) would become (ix), (v) would become (x) and (ix) would become (xi). Attention would thus be concentrated primarily on problems relating to the development of the economy, after which action would be taken on general problems.

44. Mrs. DEVAUD (France) said that the integration of women in the development process was scarcely feasible without their participation in the decision-making process. The Commission should therefore draw attention to the need for the participation of women at the political level.

45. Ms. BOKOR-SZEGO (Hungary), referring to the study listed in section B.1.(b) (iv), said that consideration should be given to a study of readaptation to work after maternity leave, in particular through refresher courses. In view of the current rapid rate of progress in science and technology, Governments should follow the example of the Government of Hungary by providing refresher courses for working women who had taken leave to look after their new-born children.

46. Ms. HENDSCH (United States of America) requested clarification concerning a number of activities and, in particular, that listed in section B.1.(b) (ii). In some cases, similar or identical studies had already been carried out by the specialized agencies or at the request of the competent commissions. The programme should make it quite clear whether an existing study was being used or updated and, if so, what further action would have to be taken.

47. Mrs. BRUCE (Assistant Director, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs), referring to section B.1.(b), drew attention to foot-note 9 which explained that the studies mentioned had specific mandates, as indicated in the text. That section simply contained a list of requests to the Secretariat from the General Assembly or the Conference. Practical action had so far been taken on only a very small number of those requests. For example, the first step to be taken in relation to the establishment of the International Institute (section B.1.(a) (i)) was to ascertain what research had already been conducted throughout the world at the national, regional or international level - a task which would take some time.

48. The studies under section B.1.(b) were not listed in order of priority, but on the basis of the source of the request; studies requested by the General Assembly, the highest organ in the United Nations system, were thus listed before those requested in the World Plan of Action. The Secretariat had certainly not intended to give the impression that insufficient attention was being given to the question of rural women, for General Assembly resolution 3523 (XXX) provided a clear mandate on that point. If stress appeared to be laid on research, it was because the recommendations concerning such activities were more specific.

49. The activities listed under section B.2. and 3. were of a general nature, and guidance from the Commission would be particularly welcome.

50. There appeared to be some confusion concerning the principal objectives of the interagency programme (document E/CN.6/594/Add.1). Those objectives had been agreed on by the specialized agencies at the September meeting and should not be changed by the Commission. They were based on mandates emanating from the General Assembly, the Conference, the World Plan of Action and the governing bodies of the specialized agencies themselves. Some concern had been expressed that the situation of rural women might no longer constitute a principal objective for the agencies. In fact, because of practical organizational difficulties in the specialized agencies, it was impossible to divorce activities relating to rural women from those connected with the more general question of the participation of women in economic life. In a document prepared for the joint interagency meeting, which members were at liberty to consult, nine principal objectives had been established and each principal objective had been divided into a number of specific objectives. Under principal objective 3 concerning the participation of women in economic life, several specific objectives related to rural women in particular. A number of other specific objectives relating to education and health also focused on the problems of rural women. In addition, the Economic and Social Council's mandate concerning the Voluntary Fund was that priority attention should be given to women in rural and marginal urban areas. There was consequently no doubt about the priorities which had been established.

51. Ms. HENDSCH expressed concern that the study listed in section B.1.(b) (ii) had already been conducted in 1970 by UNICEF and UNESCO. In addition, the studies listed in section B.1.(b) (viii) and (ix) had been carried out at the behest of the Commission for Social Development. The point was that only limited resources were available for the implementation of any plan of action. If some other organization continued to exercise responsibility for a study similar to, or identical with, one listed in the programme under consideration, that organization should not be relieved of the responsibility. The Commission should certainly not use its resources to enable those organizations to continue what they had already been doing. The study listed in section B.1.(b) (x), for example, should be carried out and completed by UNICEF and WHO with their own resources and in accordance with their own mandate. Perhaps the Commission could remind those bodies which had given mandates for studies of that kind to ensure that they were completed.

52. Mrs. SIPILA (Assistant Secretary-General, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs) explained that the studies listed in section B.1.(b) comprised activities for which specific requests had been made. There was no suggestion whatever that those activities should become programmes of the Commission; they were intended for implementation by the United Nations system as a whole. Nor was there any question of the Commission assuming responsibility for finding the necessary resources for those activities. All that the Secretariat sought from the Commission was guidance on the programme and on priorities. The organizations comprising the United Nations system would then be responsible for carrying out the programme.

53. On the question of the publicity to be given to the Decade, the Secretariat would like to know whether the use of the now well-known symbol for the Year should be continued.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.