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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Resumed Twenty-sixth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 670th MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 13 December 1976, at 10.10 a.m.

Chairman:

Mrs. COCKCROFT

(United Kingdom)

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

(a) PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE 1980 CONFERENCE (E/CN.6/600; E/CN.6/L.713;
E/CN.6/NGO/258 and 269)

1. Mrs. BRUCE (Deputy Director, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs) said that although she had introduced document E/CN.6/600 during the first part of the session, she would like to draw the Commission's attention to some of the points on which the Secretariat would need guidance before it could go ahead with detailed preparations for the 1980 conference. The decision to hold the conference had been taken by the General Assembly in resolution 3520 (XXX); that "umbrella" resolution had endorsed the recommendations of the Mexico City Conference and had stated that the purpose of the 1980 conference was to review and evaluate the progress made in implementing the objectives of the International Women's Year and, where necessary, to readjust existing programmes in the light of new data and research available. The Commission was fortunate in having four years in which to prepare for the conference, and could also give very careful consideration to its financial implications.

2. Section I of the document described the objectives of the conference and drew attention to the minimum objectives to be achieved in the period 1975-1980. Section II dealt with the substantive preparation of the conference, and the Secretariat would welcome the Commission's guidance on the agenda. It had suggested three main topics which related to each of the themes of the Year and the Decade; they were set out in paragraph 13 and would need elaboration, depending on the kind of committee structure the Commission would like to have at the conference. The Secretariat would also appreciate guidance regarding documentation; she believed that some of the draft resolutions before the Commission contained a number of proposals concerning possible agenda items and documentation, and she hoped that they would be discussed in conjunction with paragraph 13. The Commission would recall that it had not been possible to hold specific regional conferences to prepare for the 1975 Conference, although it had been possible to organize some regional seminars. The Secretariat felt that the Commission might wish to consider the type of regional preparation desired for the 1980 conference, including the desirability of convening regional governmental conferences in 1979, or in 1978 and 1979; in the case of governmental conferences, travel and subsistence expenses would, of course, be borne by the Governments concerned, and not by the United Nations budget. The Commission might wish to consider whether a preparatory committee should be established for the conference, or whether it wanted to assume those functions itself in 1978 and 1980. Some members of the Commission had suggested that a committee should work along those lines in 1977. There had been no preparatory committee as such for the Mexico City Conference, partly for reasons of cost and partly for reasons of time. A consultative committee had, however, been established by the General Assembly to advise the Secretary-General on the preparation of the World Plan of Action. Paragraph 24 raised the question of the role of intergovernmental organizations outside the United Nations system and of non-governmental organizations. The Secretariat would similarly appreciate guidance from the Commission on their contribution to the preparatory meetings and to the conference itself. Section III raised certain questions of an organizational nature, such as which participants, in addition to government

representatives, should be invited to attend the conference, as well as the date, duration and site of the conference. There was also the question of a suitable title for the conference. Paragraph 31 touched upon the question of the working languages of the conference, and the following paragraph drew attention to the very preliminary estimates of the financial implications of the conference; they did not include the cost of any preparatory or regional meetings, preparatory committee or the very important pre-conference or in-conference information activities. Section IV referred to certain points concerning parallel activities at the conference and briefly recalled what had been done at the Mexico City Conference; section V focused on the kind of publicity that the Commission might wish to recommend.

3. Mrs. NIKOLAEVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) noted that whereas the topic of development had been dealt with quite fully in section I, the other two topics, namely, equality and peace, somehow seemed to have been omitted.

4. Mrs. BRUCE (Deputy Director, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs) said that paragraph 6 merely reproduced paragraph 46 of the World Plan of Action which had set out certain minimum targets that the Mexico City conference had decided should be achieved by 1980; it had been included only for the information of the Commission. In section II it was stated that the Commission might wish to consider the scope of the agenda for the conference and how it should be developed in relation to the three themes of the Decade; paragraph 13 suggested three main topics, and implied that three committees might be set up to deal with them.

5. Miss TYABJI (India) considered that the question of development should be given greater prominence; it might be divided into three sections entitled education, employment opportunities and special training schemes.

6. Mrs. DEVAUD (France) said that she entirely agreed with the representative of India. Instead of the broad themes discussed at the Mexico City Conference, the 1980 conference should focus on one dominant and specific objective. Her delegation believed that the question of development was a highly crucial one, but felt that it should be very carefully circumscribed because, in the developed and developing countries alike, the status of women was still far inferior to that of men, although development in the world was being achieved largely by the efforts of women. Accordingly, the most important task was to evaluate the contribution of women and the second to ascertain how that contribution was made and in what conditions. She felt that it would be found that, in both the developed and developing countries, the major contribution by women was made in conditions distinctly inferior to those enjoyed by men. In the developing countries, for instance, rural women were usually entrusted with the task of growing food crops and they received much less technical assistance than the men who were engaged in growing industrial crops. That kind of difficulty recurred at every level in education, vocational training, recruitment and promotion in all countries. Her delegation considered that those problems should be studied at the regional level, and that the conference should be prepared on the basis of fresh data collected at that level.

7. In addition, non-governmental organizations should be encouraged to provide as much useful information as possible, and to undertake activities relating to the conference in each State and region. Maximum benefit should be derived from the unique nature of non-governmental organizations, namely, the fact that they were closer to the people and that their members, who were recruited on a voluntary basis, were dedicated to the performance of certain tasks. She agreed with the United Kingdom representative that, at the 1980 conference, due importance should be attached to the activities of the non-governmental organizations in the Tribune. The meetings of the Tribune should not, however, be held miles away from the conference itself, as had been the case at Mexico City; the conference should benefit from the Tribune and the Tribune from the conference.
8. In order to ensure that the conference dealt precisely with the contribution of women to development, it should have a precise title, such as "The contribution of women in a changing world" or "The contribution of women to world development".
9. Mr. EHSASSI (Iran) said that the most important topic to be discussed at the conference was undoubtedly the participation and integration of women in the development process. In view of the current situation in the developing countries, priority should be given to the role of women in rural areas and to women workers. In that connexion, his delegation supported the Indian delegation's observations concerning the importance of development and its proposal that that subject should be fully covered in the agenda for the conference.
10. The preparatory work for the conference was important. Although the planning of the Mexico City Conference had given rise to a great deal of enthusiasm, the preparatory work had not been entirely satisfactory. For that reason, his delegation had co-sponsored draft resolution E/CN.6/L.695, in which it was proposed that a preparatory committee should be established; the sooner that committee was set up, the better the conference's chances of success.
11. Mrs. HUSSEIN (Egypt) pointed out that one important difference between the 1980 conference and the Mexico City Conference was that approval for the former had already been obtained from the General Assembly well before the event. It should therefore prove possible to make the forthcoming conference effective and to secure the necessary financial support. Accordingly, no attempt should be made to curtail the regional preparatory conferences, and a preparatory committee should be established in order to gather information for the conference itself.
12. Referring to the suggestion that five conference committees should be established, she considered that no decision in the matter should be taken until all the necessary information on financial implications was available. However, as the agenda for the conference would be specifically directed towards evaluation, her delegation was inclined to endorse the suggestion made in document E/CN.6/600 that three committees should be established. One of those committees - a committee on development - could consider in detail all the important questions relating to that subject, including rural development. Full consideration should also be given to the

implementation of international standards to eliminate discrimination on grounds of sex (E/CN.6/600, para. 13 (a)), a topic which had been given insufficient attention at the Mexico City Conference. It would, moreover, be useful to know whether the plenary conference was also to be considered as a committee. The documentation for the conference should be precise and not unduly copious.

13. Although the Governments of two countries had offered to act as host to the conference, her delegation had unofficially heard that one of them had withdrawn its invitation. Further information on the matter would be welcome.

14. Mrs. BRUCE (Deputy Director, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs), referring to the idea of establishing five conference committees instead of three, said that the difference in cost would be quite substantial because of the need for interpretation into all the working languages. Under United Nations rules, any additional costs entailed by the holding of a conference away from United Nations Headquarters must be borne by the host country. In Mexico City, partly for reasons of cost, only two Conference committees had been established. It was important to decide as early as possible how many committees would be needed.

15. Mr. EHSASSI (Iran) said that the question of the number of committees to be established at the conference should be carefully considered. Although the question of development was of paramount importance, that did not necessarily mean that three committees should be established to consider that topic; a committee on development might perhaps hold more meetings than the other committees.

16. Referring to his Government's invitation to act as host to the conference, he noted that his delegation had taken the initiative at Mexico City in proposing a review conference in 1980. His Government had intended to extend an invitation to act as host but had been forestalled by the Government of Bulgaria. He was now able to inform the Commission that the Government of Bulgaria had expressed willingness to withdraw its invitation. It was, of course, for the United Nations to decide where the conference was to be held, but preparations had in any case already begun in Iran.

17. The CHAIRMAN thanked the representative of Iran for his information and expressed appreciation of the work that his Government was doing to help the women of the world.

18. Begun FARIDI (Pakistan) suggested that the conference might establish three main committees and a number of sub-committees on the all-important topic of development.

19. There had been insufficient contact at Mexico City between the delegations of non-governmental organizations and those of Governments. In order to derive maximum benefit from the expertise of non-governmental organizations, they should be requested to prepare, for the conference, reports on the progress made in implementing the objectives of the International Women's Year.

20. In determining the subjects to be reviewed by the conference, it was important to ensure that no time was wasted on subjects on which insufficient data were available; top priority should be given to the participation of women in development.

21. Mr. TILLFORS (Sweden) said that discussions at the conference must obviously take place against the general theme of the Decade for Women, namely, equality, development and peace. He agreed with the representatives of France, Iran and Pakistan, however, that the conference should deal in particular with the need to increase economic opportunities for rural women in the developing countries. Attention should be concentrated on one or two topics in the preparations for the 1980 conference, and the general question of the topics to be discussed should be examined by the preparatory committee. In the opinion of his delegation, the Commission should serve as the preparatory committee and should meet, in that capacity, early in 1977 to start work on the preparations for the conference. The question of the number of committees to be established at the conference could also be referred to the preparatory committee.

22. Princess PURACHATRA (Thailand) agreed with the representatives of France, Iran and Pakistan, that non-governmental organizations should be encouraged to hold meetings to prepare for the conference and should produce reports on the results of those meetings for consideration at the conference. In many countries, particularly Iran, young women's movements did very useful work in the field of development, and such movements should also be encouraged to prepare reports for the Conference. In addition, special attention should be paid to the question of mass media.

23. In conclusion, she said that steps should be taken to ensure that the Tribune was associated much more with the work of the conference than it had been at Mexico City.

24. Mrs. HUTAR (United States of America) agreed with those representatives who had suggested that special emphasis at the conference should be placed on the role of women in development. The Indian representative's proposal that additional committees should be established to deal with education, employment opportunities and special training schemes was excellent.

25. She agreed with the French representative that special consideration should be given to new documentary material to be requested from the non-governmental organizations and other bodies. It would be helpful if the Secretariat could provide a list of the review and appraisal studies to be evaluated by the conference.

26. Of the minimum objectives set forth in the World Plan of Action (E/CONF.66/34, para. 46) for achievement by 1980, special attention should be given to the enactment of legislation on voting and eligibility for election on equal terms with men and the encouragement of greater participation of women in policy-making positions at the local, national and international levels.

27. Her delegation favoured the establishment of a preparatory committee, but felt that it should consist of more than 16 members.

28. Regional seminars should be organized to build a base for the examination and evaluation of items that might be dealt with at the conference and to provide additional documentary material for the conference. Such seminars could also deal with the question of mass communications media, a subject on which attention should, in the opinion of the sponsors of draft resolution E/CN.6/L.690, be

concentrated at the conference. The sponsors of that draft resolution also called for the appointment of a special rapporteur to make a study of the impact of mass communications media on the changing roles of men and women; that study would be most useful for the conference.

29. In conclusion, she supported the United Kingdom proposal concerning the Tribune (E/CN.6/L.713). One of the most difficult problems encountered by those who had attended the Tribune at Mexico City had been the fact that there had not been enough money to provide them with documentation. Many of them had gone to Mexico with no previous experience of international conference work; they had not understood the difference between Tribune representatives and official government representatives at the Conference and many had never heard of a World Plan of Action.

30. Mrs. BRUCE (Deputy Director, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs), referring to the request of the United States representative that the Secretariat should draw up a list of review and appraisal studies to be evaluated at the conference, drew attention to annex I to document E/CN.6/599 which consisted of a time-table illustrating the stages of the review and appraisal of the implementation of the World Plan of Action and the parallel reports required for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the International Development Strategy of the Second United Nations Development Decade.

31. It would not be possible to hold a meeting of the proposed preparatory committee early in 1977; the Economic and Social Council had to approve the Commission's recommendation, and would be unable to do so before April or May 1977.

32. She reminded members that, at Mexico City, membership of the Tribune had not been confined to non-governmental organizations in consultative status; the Tribune had been open to individuals from all over the world. That was one of the reasons why there had not been the type of feedback certain members felt was necessary. If it was thought that there should be a very close relationship between a non-governmental conference and a governmental conference, the Commission must consider a different type of Tribune from that held at Mexico City, where it had been attended by some 6,000 persons.

33. Miss TYABJI (India) agreed with the Swedish representative that the Commission itself ought to act as the preparatory committee for the conference.

34. She stressed that the conference would be a reporting conference. While not wishing to detract from the importance of the World Plan of Action, she reminded members that they had spent many weeks in September discussing the Commission's own plan of action for the decade. The Commission should subdivide the programme it had drawn up into sections, on which it should ask regional organizations and non-governmental organizations to report. She suggested that, at the conference, non-governmental organizations should be requested to show films from as many countries as possible illustrating the type of work done by those organizations, particularly in the development field.

35. In conclusion, she said that the Commission should reduce the outlay on preparatory committees and concentrate more on providing funds for conferences of regional and non-governmental organizations.

36. Mr. LEHMANN (Denmark) said that the final decision on the number of committees to be established at the conference would depend on its detailed agenda. His delegation was of the view that responsibility for preparing the conference should lie primarily with the Commission. He suggested that consideration should be given to the establishment of a deadline - the end of 1979, for instance, - for the submission of documents and proposals to be considered at the conference.

37. Mrs. ROMANOVICH (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that the 1980 conference should concentrate on the three goals for the Decade for Women, namely, equality, development and peace. In adopting the Declaration of Mexico, the World Plan of Action, the regional plans and other resolutions, the World Conference at Mexico City had set the stage for action over a 10-year period. In the opinion of her delegation, consideration of the three goals of equality, development and peace as an integrated whole was the only way in which further recommendations on the elimination of discrimination against women could be drawn up. It might eventually be necessary to establish a preparatory committee; at present, however, the preparatory work could be done by the Commission.

38. Mrs. COENE (Belgium) agreed with the representatives of France, India and Sweden that the 1980 conference should concentrate on the three objectives of the Decade for Women and on more specific topics than had been dealt with at the Mexico City Conference. The question of the participation of women in the development of their countries seemed an ideal subject for consideration in 1980.

39. The Commission would have an important role to play in the preparatory work for the conference. Her delegation was aware of the importance of parallel activities at the conference but would appreciate information on how that work would be financed.

40. Miss ST. CLAIRE (Secretary of the Commission) said that since it was the General Assembly that had decided to convene a world conference in 1980, the Economic and Social Council would not have power to establish the Commission as a preparatory committee; that decision would have to be taken by the General Assembly itself.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.