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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Resumed Twenty-sixth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 675th MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 15 December 1976, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mrs. GONZALEZ de QUADROS (Colombia)

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POSSIBILITY OF THE TRANSFER TO VIENNA OF THE SECRETARIAT OF THE COMMISSION
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

1. Mrs. COCKCROFT (United Kingdom), speaking as Vice-Chairman of the Commission, drew attention to a very important decision which was to be taken that very day at New York by the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly. It concerned the transfer to Vienna of the secretariat of the Commission on the Status of Women and of the Commission on Human Rights. Most of the members of the Fifth Committee seemed to favour such a transfer. In her capacity as Vice-Chairman of the Commission she was concerned at the idea that the secretariat of the Commission, if transferred to Vienna, would be completely separated from the services of the Council, the General Assembly and all the important bodies with which it had to work and which had their headquarters in New York.
2. Ms. FREDGARD (Sweden) said that her delegation, too, was greatly concerned at the decision which was about to be taken at New York. The Swedish Government attached great importance to the work of the United Nations in the social and humanitarian fields. The Commission on the Status of Women had a duty to ensure that its secretariat was in a position to accomplish its task. To that end, the appropriate resources must be made available to it and the United Nations should help it in its efforts to attain its objectives. Social and economic development and the promotion of human rights were closely linked. The secretariat of the Commission had to be able to follow the work of the United Nations in all fields.
3. She was of the opinion that a message should be sent to the Fifth Committee, urging it to oppose the decision to transfer the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs to Vienna.
4. Mrs. HIRLEMANN (France) stressed the gravity of the problem. The secretariat of the Commission had been in New York for 20 years. It had a qualified staff, most of whom would be unable to move for family reasons. It would therefore be necessary, at Vienna, to engage new staff who would require several years to be able to perform their functions effectively. She regretted that it was considered necessary to transfer staff from New York or Geneva to fill a large building which had just been erected in Vienna. Reference had been made to savings, but the arrival at Vienna of large numbers of international civil servants would probably cause an increase in the cost of living and the anticipated benefits would be illusory. Moreover, the new premises recently constructed at Geneva could accommodate a large number of persons; if staff were transferred to Vienna, the considerable expenditure incurred at Geneva would have served no purpose. In her opinion, the Commission should protest.
5. Mrs. BRUCE (Deputy Director, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs) requested the delegations concerned about that question to allow her time to telephone New York in order to ascertain the facts of the situation. She was aware that the matter had been discussed in the Third Committee and that a decision was to be taken shortly by the Fifth Committee. She would contact the competent services at New York as soon as she had introduced agenda item 5. She therefore asked the Commission to be patient; she hoped to be able to provide some information before the end of the meeting.

INFLUENCE OF THE MASS COMMUNICATION MEDIA ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ROLES OF WOMEN AND MEN IN PRESENT-DAY SOCIETY (agenda item 5) (E/CN.6/581 and 601; E/CN.6/L.690 and L.714).

6. Mrs. BRUCE (Deputy Director, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs) introduced document E/CN.6/601, which should be examined in conjunction with the report submitted to the Commission at its twenty-fifth session (E/CN.6/581). It was based on the reports communicated by 26 Governments and 22 non-governmental organizations. It was clear from those replies, and from the discussions which had been held during various meetings and seminars that attitudes towards the roles of women and men in present-day society must be changed, and that the mass communication media could exert considerable influence in that regard.
7. The report itself (E/CN.6/601) indicated the conclusions to be drawn from the discussions which had taken place at meetings held in 1975, such as the International Symposium on Women in Cinema and the Media Workshop for Journalists and Broadcasters organized by UNESCO in July 1975 (chapter III of the report).
8. The Soviet delegation had suggested that it would be appropriate to schedule a seminar on the mass communication media during a year when the Commission did not meet. Unfortunately, it had been impossible to hold the proposed seminar in 1975 because Australia had withdrawn its invitation, and the Commission had not yet received an invitation for 1977. As was known, a seminar could be held only if a country offered to act as host, and that obviously implied a financial burden. The fact that no seminar had yet been held was therefore not due to a lack of interest or goodwill. In 1977, a regional seminar would be organized in Nepal to study questions concerning women and development, as a follow-up to the Mexico Conference.
9. Chapter IV of the report dealt with the resistance created by the establishment of guidelines concerning the concept of media responsibility to the public, on the grounds that they constituted an infringement of the principle of freedom of information.
10. Chapter V suggested a number of measures which could be taken to influence current attitudes and which were based on the comments and recommendations made at the various meetings that had been held.
11. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Commission should examine draft resolution E/CN.6/L.690 and requested one of the sponsors to introduce the text, which had a direct bearing on all matters relating to agenda item 5. After its introduction, delegations would be able to comment on document E/CN.6/601, the observations of the Deputy Director and the draft resolution.
12. Mrs. HUTAR (United States of America), speaking on behalf of the sponsors of the draft resolution, congratulated the secretariat on the report contained in document E/CN.6/601.

13. In the past several years, some progress had been made with regard to the influence of the mass communication media on attitudes towards the role of women and men in present-day society. Indeed, the media could play a vital role in that area and they must be encouraged to project a suitable, positive image of women. That was an important question, and the Commission should consider its inclusion in the agenda of the 1980 conference. It could also be examined at regional seminars so as to bring out differences in the attitudes of the mass communication media towards women.

14. In the United States, the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year was preparing guidelines or minimum standards for the treatment of women in the media and had sent a questionnaire to writers, producers, directors and advertising agencies to draw their attention to the disadvantages of perpetuating myths concerning the aspirations of women and their role in society. On 1 July 1976 that Commission had presented a number of recommendations to the President of the United States, including a request for the preparation of a study on the impact of the media and urging the adoption of non-discriminatory standards. Similar efforts had been made in other countries.

15. Draft resolution E/CN.6/L.690 noted that the mass communications media could have a detrimental effect on the attitudes and values regarding women's roles in society, but it also recognized that the media had great potential in several fields relating to the advancement of women. The sponsors called on Member States to work in collaboration with the mass communications media but, in order to avoid infringing the freedom of the press, they had been careful to use the terms "recommend", "suggest" and "encourage".

16. The sponsors wished to make the following changes in the draft resolution. First, they accepted the Belgian amendment to paragraph 1 (b) (E/CN.6/L.714). In paragraph 7, the words "Decides to request the appointment of a special rapporteur" should be replaced by "Decides to appoint a special rapporteur". In paragraph 8, the text following the words "Secretary-General submit" should be replaced by "a progress report together with its findings to the Commission on the Status of Women at its twenty-eighth session". In paragraph 9, the words "Requests further that the General Assembly" should be replaced by the words "Recommends further that the Ad hoc Committee", and at the end of that paragraph the words "as an agenda item" should be replaced by the words "as a possible agenda item".

17. Miss ST. CLAIRE (Secretary of the Commission) pointed out that the appointment of the special rapporteur referred to in paragraph 7 would have the following implications:

2 trips to New York, each of 1 week's duration

- Travel (1st class accommodation)	\$ 2,860
- Subsistence at 140 per cent of the per diem rate ..	\$ 920
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Total	\$ 3,780

1 trip to Paris of 1 week's duration

- Travel (1st class accommodation)	\$ 1,915
- Subsistence at 140 per cent of the per diem rate ..	\$ 370
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Total	\$ 2,285

Grand total

	\$ 6,065
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These travel costs were based on a world average, so that the amount of \$6,065 would cover the costs of a rapporteur coming from any region.

18. Mrs. AHRLAND (Sweden) congratulated the sponsors of the draft resolution, which dealt with a particularly important question; all delegations were aware of the important role that the mass communication media could play in changing attitudes. However, her country was unable to agree to a provision that would call on Governments to interfere with the press, television or radio, even for a laudable purpose; in its opinion, the principle of the freedom of the press was sacred. Without a free press, neither men nor women were free. That was why her delegation requested the deletion of paragraphs 3 and 5 and proposed that the beginning of paragraph 1 should be amended to read: "Encourages Member States to make representatives of the mass media aware of the importance of formulating ...".

19. Mr. EHSASSI (Iran) stressed that his delegation, as a sponsor of the draft, was convinced of the importance of the role that the media had to play to bring about a change in traditional attitudes. The amendments proposed by the United States representative were quite acceptable, except that the one relating to paragraph 9 should refer to the "ad hoc committee" rather than the "preparatory committee".

20. The Swedish amendment to operative paragraph 1 seemed well-advised. On the other hand, it would be difficult to accept the deletion of paragraphs 3 and 5; while their provisions were not applicable in certain countries, they were in many others and should not be deleted.

21. Mrs. HUTAR (United States of America) wondered whether the special rapporteur whose appointment was proposed in paragraph 7 could not be chosen from among the members of the Commission; that might make it possible to achieve savings.

22. Her delegation, too, was unable to accept the deletion of paragraphs 3 and 5. Those paragraphs did not constitute an infringement of the freedom of the press; they merely called for the provision of advisory services, which could be furnished by persons acting not on behalf of the Government, but in their private capacity.

23. Miss ST. CLAIRE (Secretary of the Commission), replying to the question raised by the United States representative, recalled that the General Assembly itself had laid down the procedure for the appointment of special rapporteurs: they acted on their own behalf and were all subject to the same treatment with regard, for example, to trips and subsistence allowances. Whether or not the rapporteur was chosen from among the members of the Commission would in no way alter the financial implications of his appointment.

24. Miss TYABJI (India) suggested two changes in the important draft resolution before the Commission.

25. First, she proposed that the words "especially in the fields of development and social welfare" should be added at the end of paragraph 1 (c).

26. Secondly, she pointed out that while advertising was referred to in the preamble it was not mentioned in the operative part, although it was particularly influential in countries where illiteracy still existed. The words ", including particularly in the field of advertising" might therefore be added at the end of paragraph 6.

27. Mrs. THOMPSON-TRENOU (Togo) warmly thanked the co-sponsors for having prepared such an excellent draft resolution, which dealt with a particularly important question, especially for certain parts of Africa. The problem had emerged in its crudest form during the International Women's Year, when songs, stories, comic strips, broadcasts and articles ridiculing the aspirations of African women and depicting them as being unworthy of trust and incapable of assuming their responsibilities had proliferated in a number of African countries. Since then, many regional seminars, symposia and congresses had thrown light on the pernicious role played by the mass communications media in that respect. The draft resolution before them was therefore very timely and she hoped that, once adopted, it would have a marked impact in the African countries where much still remained to be done, particularly in matters of film censorship, which was very poor especially in the case of films for children.

28. The financial implications of the draft resolution should not be an obstacle. The United Nations had substantial resources at its disposal for other purposes and should seize the opportunity to show that it was ready to do something specific for women.

29. The freedom of the press, which had been invoked by the Swedish representative, was not being called in question. The intention was not to deprive the communications media of their freedom of expression but to make it clear that such freedom must not be used to attack the dignity of women, as freedom was circumscribed by respect for others. The Union of Togolese Women had recently made great efforts to improve the image of women portrayed in the mass media, which had an important educational role in Africa and should therefore be watched closely.

30. For those reasons, her delegation formally requested to become a co-sponsor of the draft resolution.

31. Mrs. DAHLERUP (Denmark) welcomed Togo as a co-sponsor of the draft resolution. Her delegation did not quite understand the point made by the Swedish representative.

32. Mrs. AHRLAND (Sweden) explained that her delegation's position was irreconcilable with that of the co-sponsors of the draft. She could not make concessions on such an important matter and therefore maintained her request that paragraphs 3 and 5 should be deleted.

33. Mrs. HUSSEIN (Egypt) commended the report by the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/601):

34. Referring to the last preambular paragraph of draft resolution E/CN.6/L.690 which stated that "the press, radio, films and television are playing a paramount role in shaping attitudes and destinies of humankind", she did not think that a phrase taken from a speech by a senior official of UNESCO (E/CN.6/601, para. 17) should be reproduced word for word in a draft resolution. In any event, that statement was somewhat of an exaggeration, especially as the same subparagraph stated that "there is need for research in this area". It should be made clear that those words were a quotation; otherwise the statement should be reworded or deleted.

35. With regard to the special rapporteur, she would like more information on the way he was to undertake his study. For instance, would he confine himself to consultations at United Nations headquarters or would he also seek the views of competent specialized agencies such as the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and UNESCO?

36. Referring to the concern expressed by the Swedish delegation that the media's freedom of expression should not be restricted, she explained that paragraph 5 of the draft resolution was not intended to limit such freedom but to keep track of information provided and try to orient it. Private persons and non-governmental organizations had an even more important role to play in that respect than Governments, but it was naturally desirable to obtain the latter's support.

37. Mr. EHSASSI (Iran) said that a special rapporteur was usually assisted by one or more persons who gathered information on the activities of various United Nations bodies in the field covered by his study.

38. He interpreted the Swedish representative's remarks on paragraphs 3 and 5 of the draft resolution as a reservation and not as a proposal for their deletion, to which his delegation could not agree in any case.

39. Mr. VALLARTA (Mexico) supported draft resolution E/CN.6/L.690. However, he would like the text to bring out more clearly the need for woman's liberation to be linked to her integration into the development process. He proposed the addition, after the words "special rapporteur" in paragraph 7, of the following: "taking into account the relationship between the economic and social development process of countries and the integration of women into that process on an equal footing with men".

40. Mrs. COENE (Belgium), referring to paragraph 7 of the draft resolution, said that the International Council of Women had decided, at its meeting in Vancouver, to conduct an enquiry in 69 countries. Several persons would follow the daily newspapers for three years and collect information on the image of women presented by those media and on the role played by the latter in perpetuating stereotypes. The information would be incorporated in a document which would then be sent to the international organizations. She wondered whether it would be possible, in order to avoid duplication of effort and unnecessary expenditure, to collaborate with the International Council of Women in that respect.

41. Miss TYABJI (India) suggested adding to the text of the draft resolution a paragraph 5 bis reading as follows: "Requests that, particularly with a view to helping the developing countries, UNESCO be asked to prepare pilot educational films (a) for primary schools and (b) for functional literacy, which would also be concerned with improving the image of women and doing away with stereotyped sex roles".
42. Mrs. HIRLEMANN (France) asked whether the many amendments that had been submitted could be made available to the members of the Commission in writing the following morning.
43. Mr. TSCHERNING (Sweden), referring to the comments of the Iranian representative, explained that his delegation had suggested the deletion of paragraphs 3 and 5 in order to safeguard the complete freedom of expression and independence of the communications media, but would not object to the adoption of the draft resolution by consensus if that was the wish of the Commission.
44. Mrs. NIKOLAEVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) emphasized the importance of the influence exerted by the communications media on attitudes towards women, and deplored the fact that the Commission had not had time to study the question more thoroughly and that more documents had not been submitted on the subject.
45. The idea that Member States should condemn the use of the communications media, of literature and of art for the purpose of demeaning women should be introduced in paragraph 2 of the draft resolution.
46. Paragraph 4 was incomplete, because the communications media had a role to play in the emancipation of women not only at the educational and professional levels but at the political, civic and cultural levels as well. The paragraph should therefore be supplemented along those lines. The draft resolution should also include a paragraph on the role of UNESCO and the other specialized agencies capable of making a useful contribution to the solution of the problem under discussion.
47. With regard to paragraph 7, she said that activities already planned by the United Nations should not be overlooked; there was in fact to be an international seminar on such questions. The seminar should definitely not be cancelled. Australia had initially offered to act as host, and the difficulties it had subsequently encountered had perhaps now been overcome. An invitation had therefore been extended, and it should be followed up in a reasonably short time.
48. In conclusion, she said that exchanges of views on the questions referred to in paragraph 7 should be continued, and that special attention should be devoted to them in view of the importance of the role the mass media could play.
49. Mrs. HUTAR (United States of America) said that the Egyptian delegation should give the sponsors of the text its draft amendments to the last preambular paragraph. Her delegation was prepared to accept the proposed Mexican amendment, which might

perhaps appear as a separate sentence. The delegations of Egypt and Belgium had referred to the value of information presented at seminars and studies on the way the mass media influenced attitudes towards the role of women, and she agreed that it would be useful for the special rapporteur to refer to the documentation generated by such seminars and studies.

50. The Indian amendments would, in her view, be acceptable to the sponsors of the draft resolution. She then commended the representative of the Soviet Union on the excellent ideas she had presented.

51. Generally speaking, there had been a vigorous response to draft resolution E/CN.6/L.690; she hoped that its consideration could soon be completed and the text adopted. Her delegation would like to make a slight change in paragraph 5 by replacing the words "the governmental and private sectors" by the words "the governmental, the intergovernmental and the private sectors". In suggesting that amendment, she was thinking in particular of the activities of the Inter-American Commission on Women, which had included the improvement of the image of women in the mass media among the objectives of its regional plan of action.

52. Princess PURATCHATRA (Thailand) suggested that reference should be made in paragraph 6 to organizations that were in contact with the mass communications media, such as reporters', press correspondents' and photographers' associations.

53. She agreed with the representative of France that the entire text should be redrafted so that the Commission could take its decision on the basis of a clear text.

54. Mr. EHSASSI (Iran) said that his delegation, which had sponsored the draft resolution, had been struck by the enthusiasm it had aroused. The many amendments submitted had been constructive for the most part, but their wording should be improved and they should be submitted in writing for incorporation into the text. The Mexican amendment for example, could be made rather more concise, and reworded to read: "taking into account the close relationships between the economic and social aspects of development and the full integration of women ...". The Indian amendment should also be reworded to some extent. Moreover, the amendment proposed by the United States to paragraph 5 would entail some changes in the latter. It would be best, therefore, to defer consideration of the amendments to the following day and to ask their authors to submit them in writing.

55. Begum FARIDI (Pakistan) thought that the representative of Thailand had made an excellent suggestion with regard to organizations in contact with the mass communications media; consumer associations might be included as well. The mass media could - through songs, for example - break the spirit of young people and denigrate women in an insidious fashion, as the representative of Togo had pointed out. Consumers, half of whom were women, could by their attitude put an end to those tendencies without any need for action by Governments.

56. She congratulated the sponsors of the draft resolution, who had gone to the heart of the matter and had aroused the interest of all members of the Commission.

57. The CHAIRMAN recapitulated the proposed amendments to the draft resolution. Their authors should submit them in writing to the Secretariat, which would then transmit them to the sponsors of the draft who would prepare a revised text for the following day.

58. If there were no objections, she would take it that the Commission approved that procedure.

59. It was so decided.

60. The CHAIRMAN said that the Drafting Committee would meet after the meeting to review the wording of those articles of the draft convention which had been adopted. She reminded the Commission that the Committee consisted of the representatives of Mexico, the USSR, the United States and France. The representative of Denmark had been invited to join the Committee for the preparation of the final provisions.

61. In reply to a question from Mrs. HIRLEMANN (France), the CHAIRMAN said that the Drafting Committee could only make drafting changes in the provisions which had been adopted. It should in particular ensure that the texts in the different languages were identical.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.