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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 20th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. SOMAVIA (Chile)
later: Ms. ZINDOGA (Zimbabwe)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 101: ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
(continued) (A/45/3, Chap. V, sect. B, A/45/38, A/45/426, A/45/202, A/45/222,
A/45/225, A/45/230, A/45/254, A/45/264, A/45/265, A/45/269, A/45/270; A/C.3/45/5)

AGENDA ITEM 102: FORWARD-LOOKING STRATEGIES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN TO THE
YEAR 2000 (continued) (A/45/3, Chap. V, sect. B, A/45/347, A/45/489, A/45/548;
A/C.3/45/5)

1. Mrs. REGAZZOLI (Argentina) said that, one third of the way to their target date, the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies were still encountering obstacles because of the deep-seated resistance to the advancement of women and the decline in the resources devoted to it as a result of the deterioration of the world economic situation at the end of the 1980s. That was why the implementation of the Strategies must be accelerated in the next 10 years. A setback would be very costly from the point of view of economic and social development, the utilization of human resources and the general progress of society.

2. Most countries had guaranteed equality of opportunity in their legislation, but de facto and de jure discrimination continued to exist, and Governments and non-governmental organizations must act at the political and economic level to eliminate it. One of the obstacles to the elimination of de facto discrimination was that most men and women were unaware of women's rights and did not really understand the legal and administrative machinery for implementing them. It was therefore necessary to give women some basic legal education, using traditional and other educational systems, in order to achieve tangible results by 1994.

3. Information must also be widely disseminated on the work of the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women through media to which all women had easy access in order to make them aware of their rights. The national reports submitted to the Committee should also be disseminated in every country and analysed by governmental and non-governmental bodies to ensure that they reflected the national reality.

4. Her Government hoped that the United Nations, including the International Labour Office and UNESCO, would examine the achievements of countries in sensitizing the public to basic rights, in order to help Governments, non-governmental organizations and women's movements to carry out effective campaigns. In both intramural and extramural education, Governments should encourage the revision, in conformity with the legislation and practice of their countries, of all textbooks in order to eliminate sexist prejudices. They should also combat the stereotypes spread by the media.

5. Women had always constituted a large proportion of the active population, and that proportion was increasing continuously. However, their participation in the economy remained characterized by job, salary and career prospect inequalities and by their exclusion from economic decision-making.

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(Mrs. Regazzoli, Argentina)

6. The 1980s had witnessed a net impoverishment of Latin America and the Caribbean. The region's gross product had declined by 10 per cent; that figure alone highlighted the growing inability of the Latin American Governments to meet even the elementary needs of women. Industrial backwardness, inflation, debt, the violation of human rights and adjustment plans had been the centre of attention, and it was clear that the region's economic decline was not a mere cyclical phenomenon. The developing world's financial, economic and social crisis had led to a growing deterioration in the situation of large parts of the population, in particular women, by widening the gap in income distribution and deepening unemployment, which affected women more than men. The adjustment plans had in fact led to a large decrease in social expenditures, particularly in the fields of education, health and housing.

7. It was well known that the social, economic and political mobility of women was a direct function of their educational level. It was not easy to carry out large-scale social programmes among rural and working women, handicapped women or mothers of large families.

8. Poor women who were heads of household or unmarried were subject to twofold discrimination. Hundreds of thousands of them provided for their families by doing badly paid work without social protection of any kind.

9. As women could not enjoy equal rights or make progress against a background of war and tension, it was highly important for countries to live together in harmony. The international community must also eliminate drug trafficking, which further intensified the extreme poverty of women.

10. Another great problem for which no statistics were available was that of violence, including physical and psychological violence, harassment, sexual ill-treatment and incest, which were all a result of the imbalance of power between men and women and were reinforced by the commercialization of sexual relations, the most obvious manifestations of which were the traffic in women and prostitution. To those must be added the intolerable new violations of human rights constituted by the traffic in and sale of children from the poorest sectors of society. Governments could not remain indifferent to the appearance of so infamous a traffic.

11. The advancement of women also depended on their participation in important political decisions, including those relating to international security, the elimination of poverty and environmental protection.

12. Government bodies, women's associations and international organizations such as the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, UNIFEM, UNIDO and ILO should orient their research efforts towards the collection of data and their financial and technical support towards enlarging the possibilities for women to participate in economic, cultural and social policy and to become the driving force for development plans which would protect them from injustice and poverty.

(Mrs. Regazzoli, Argentina)

13. Her delegation welcomed the proposal by Austria concerning the holding of a world conference on women in 1995 (A/C.3/45/5).
14. Mr. PULZ (Czechoslovakia) agreed with the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna that the advancement of women was an essential element of economic and social progress and that the United Nations could not fulfil its mission without giving it attention.
15. His delegation shared the evaluation of the progress made and the remaining obstacles to the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies made by the Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-fourth session and supported the recommendations and conclusions of the first review and appraisal of the implementation of the Strategies approved by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1990/15, as well as resolution 1990/12, in which the Council had recommended that a world conference on women be held in 1995. The conference should provide an opportunity for a high-level analysis of the implementation of the Strategies and to give new impetus to the advancement of women and the mobilization of international public opinion for that purpose. His delegation welcomed the offer made by the Government of Austria (A/C.3/45/5) for the holding of the conference at Vienna. It had hoped to contribute to the conference's success and was considering the possibility of arranging a preparatory European regional meeting in 1994.
16. Another significant international event directly relating to the status of women would be the International Year of the Family. The Year would make it possible to focus attention on equality of men and women in the family and the division of responsibility, as well as the participation of married women and mothers in economic and social life.
17. His delegation was glad that the advancement of women had been one of the priorities in the preparation of the International Development Strategy for the fourth United Nations Development Decade. It shared the conclusions adopted in that regard by the Economic and Social Council (resolution 1990/10 and decision 1990/215).
18. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 41/213 (A/45/226) and on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/45/548) showed that additional efforts would be required to increase the percentage of women in the Secretariat to the desired level. His delegation had supported Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/3 to that end.
19. With regard to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, an important legal instrument, the United Nations and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women were playing an important role in ensuring that more countries acceded to it and put its contents into practice. His delegation had followed the work of the Committee's ninth session with interest and supported its conclusions (A/45/38), including the two general recommendations, No. 14 and No. 15. It welcomed the decision to discuss

(Mr. Pulz, Czechoslovakia)

the implementation of various articles of the Convention. Czechoslovakia had submitted its second periodic report on the implementation of the Convention and intended, when the report was considered, to supply new information reflecting the political and economic changes which had recently occurred in Czechoslovakia and which had resulted in a more open and consistent approach to implementation of the Convention.

20. His Government was currently studying new means of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women on the basis of the Strategies, the work of the United Nations and the principle that the State bore responsibility for resolving the basic issues relating to the status of women. It was also endeavouring to resolve a number of problems inherited from the past, including poor representation of women in senior posts in elected organs, administration and management and the economy, the fact that the average salary of women was one third lower than that of men, and the barriers to the enjoyment of leisure time by women.

21. Mrs. KARMACHARYA (Nepal), the Secretary-General of the Nepal Women's Association, said that she had worked all her life for the restoration of democracy, respect for human rights and the advancement of women in her country. After centuries of discrimination and humiliation, women could now look forward to the advent of a new era in which their active participation, on a basis of equality with men, would be universally recognized. Yet while wide-ranging responsibilities were now assumed by women in developed societies, that was not the case in developing countries. In Nepal strongly held traditional prejudices against women persisted. Girls, looked upon as liabilities at birth, were deprived of proper education and condemned to household work for the rest of their lives. That was why the Nepal Women's Association was involved in mobilizing popular support to change that state of affairs. Change was desirable not only on moral grounds but also because of socio-economic considerations. The Association had a two-pronged approach: firstly, to persuade the Government to adopt legislation prohibiting discrimination against women and ensuring equal opportunities; and secondly, to educate people in order to overcome traditional prejudices.

22. Social transformation to a large extent depended on the political context. The recent political changes in Nepal heralding democracy and political pluralism would undoubtedly help to eliminate discrimination against women. Women had, moreover, played a vital role in the pro-democracy movement.

23. Nepal would soon adopt a new constitution reaffirming equal rights for men and women and reserving some seats for women in the national legislature. Throughout the country women in all walks of life were gaining an awareness of their status and were forming organizations to promote their cause. One of the pioneer non-governmental organizations, the Nepal Women's Association, founded in 1947 and re-established after a 30-year ban, had already opened branch offices throughout the country. Inspired by the principles of democratic socialism, nationalism and fundamental human rights, the Association aimed to include women in the development process by making them socially and economically self-reliant. The task was arduous. The Association had to form and train a cadre of motivated volunteers,

(Mrs. Karmacharya, Nepal)

learn from the experience of other countries, formulate policy options and legal instruments, and develop projects and find ways of implementing them. International co-operation was essential to those ends.

24. At the regional level the seven countries of south Asia had been working together in addressing women's emancipation within the framework of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) since its establishment in 1985. The member countries held expert group meetings on a regular basis to develop strategies, and had decided to mobilize public opinion in the SAARC region by declaring 1990 the Year of the Girl Child.

25. At the international level, her delegation commended the role played by the United Nations in the advancement of women, particularly by the declaration in 1975 of the International Women's Year and the adoption in 1985 of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, which contained extremely valuable recommendations in the areas of education, population and health. Her delegation firmly believed that strict implementation of the Strategies would ensure full participation by women in national development and that the declaration of the United Nations Decade for Women had contributed to bringing the role of women in development and peace into sharper focus. She hoped that the world conference on women, to be held in 1995, would provide an opportunity to review progress to date, and she welcomed the offer by the Austrian Government to host the conference at Vienna. Nepal considered the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to be the most important instrument for the advancement of women and was considering acceding to it.

26. She thanked all the relevant United Nations agencies, the World Bank and IMF for their support and appealed to them to continue to pay attention to the role of women, particularly rural women, in development, by formulating projects in the field of education, maternal and child welfare, employment and social services. Her delegation also commended the work of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), whose assistance had been most helpful in the areas of research studies, project identification and training of personnel, and stressed the importance of UNDP's efforts to redefine development in terms of human values and quality of life. She urged those organizations to go a step further and earmark an appropriate portion of their regular assistance for innovative field programmes for women. Such assistance, to be more effective, should be managed by nationals of recipient countries in view of local sensitivities. She noted with satisfaction that the role of women in sustained development had been duly recognized in the international development strategy for the fourth United Nations development decade. The international efforts to eliminate discrimination against women must not lose their momentum at a time when the international political context was witnessing the emergence of a new order based on peace and co-operation.

27. Mrs. RAKOTONDRAMBOA (Madagascar) noted that the cultures of the world, which in other respects were so diverse, had, in a rare example of convergence, carefully nurtured a tradition of exploiting women over several millenniums. It was only at the end of the previous century that some women had begun to tackle the mountain of prejudices by organizing themselves to defend their interests and those of their sisters. Almost another century had elapsed before attempts to ensure the full acceptance of women as individuals had led to the adoption in 1979 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and, in 1985, of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. In the five years since Nairobi, progress had been slow, largely due to the current economic situation.

28. Since developing countries were the most affected and 82 per cent of the population of Madagascar was rural, her delegation drew attention to the deterioration in the living conditions of women in rural areas. Wages remained stagnant in relation to the costs of imported basic products, male unemployment was increasing, and women were obliged to seek employment in the informal sector where conditions of work were deplorable. Moreover, austerity measures taken by Governments had led to a reduction in public expenditure, particularly in the social domain, which worsened still further the situation of women and children. Rural women were more affected than city dwellers, since the economic situation exacerbated traditional discriminatory attitudes and in effect put the means of production, including land, credit and the training which could rescue them from poverty, out of their reach. More than ever before rural women were confined to wretched agricultural, household or family work. Before the crisis they had been able to benefit from the product of their labour, but the simple yet effective education, health and transport infrastructures had so deteriorated that there had been a renewal of the male rural exodus. The nature of rural life had been altered thereby: women alone had had to shoulder the burden of responsibilities which had previously been shared, and poverty among women was spreading. In turn women themselves, particularly the young, were migrating to towns, in a futile quest for work.

29. A further consequence of the deterioration in the quality of life in rural areas was the deterioration in health conditions. Vulnerability to infectious and parasitic diseases (tuberculosis and malaria) and increased maternal mortality were attributable above all to social, economic, cultural and educational factors. As a result output was falling, aggravating an already catastrophic financial situation.

30. Women made up 51 per cent of the population of Madagascar. Though a significant number were found in medicine, law, teaching and private enterprise, their potential was not sufficiently tapped. National accounting mechanisms did not take into consideration women's work in the home and in the fields as a visible economic factor. She noted that 40.3 per cent of the country's illiterate population were women against 28.5 per cent men. Girls accounted for 46 per cent of the student population in primary schools, 45 per cent in secondary schools, and 43 per cent in higher education. The Constitution guaranteed the same rights to Malagasy women as to men, but women could not take advantage of those rights, for lack of education. Her Government, convinced that the promotion of women would contribute to the well-being and prosperity of all, had passed a series of laws in

(Mrs. Rakotondramboa, Madagascar)

July 1990 to correct various anomalies or injustices. A married woman could now keep her own name, take her husband's, or use both. Upon divorce, the wife had the right to an equal share with her husband of the common marital property; the couple's place of residence was decided by mutual agreement.

31. Her delegation welcomed the action by United Nations organizations to improve the status of women. It supported the recommendations of the Commission on the Status of Women aimed at combating the feminization of poverty in developing countries, no longer in the form of piecemeal charitable measures, but through programmes integrated into general economic efforts.

32. Ms. Zindoga (Zimbabwe) took the Chair.

33. Mr. STUART (Australia) emphasized the significance of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, as well as the connection between the work of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. He believed that their link could be strengthened without undermining the independence of the Committee, which he felt did not receive the support it deserved from the United Nations Secretariat. As a demonstration of the importance it attached to the Committee's work and to universal accession to the Convention, Australia would join New Zealand in sponsoring a symposium for countries of the South Pacific Forum in March 1991.

34. His delegation wished to emphasize the progress which still must be made towards full implementation of the Forward-looking Strategies, particularly in improving the situation of women who were doubly disadvantaged: elderly women, who faced problems such as isolation, neglect, ill-health and lack of a secure income; women with disabilities, who were less likely than men with disabilities to be satisfactorily employed or to have access to rehabilitation, vocational training or recreation; migrant women in many countries, including Australia, faced with language problems and difficulties in reconciling their status in their society of origin and in their new home. They were sometimes more susceptible to labour exploitation. Women heading households, refugee women and women who were victims of violence could also be added.

35. Identifying those doubly vulnerable groups of women could lead to an understanding of the broader phenomenon of feminization of poverty. It should not be believed that assistance to women in such situations reduced their incentive for advancement. Without access to tangible resources such as marketable skills, land and capital, they could not break the vicious circle. One way to help them break out was to emphasize education as a means of eliminating prejudices and stereotypes, to inform women of their rights and to teach them the necessary skills for professional and political life. Two thirds of the world's illiterate population were women. Yet female literacy would reduce maternal and infant mortality rates, improve family nutrition, reduce population growth, and also represent an investment in the literacy of future generations. UNDP had estimated that if an additional \$5 billion could be found immediately, developing countries could enjoy universal primary education by the year 2000.

(Mr. Stuart, Australia)

36. Health was also of primary importance for women. For many women working in addition to taking responsibility for children and other dependants, the problem had many dimensions. Every minute, a woman died somewhere in the world from causes associated with pregnancy. Four out of every five such deaths could have been avoided through establishment of appropriate centres, training and education. Furthermore, his delegation believed that more attention must be paid to traditional practices harmful to women, especially to young women. In many countries, those practices were directly related to the status of women, and efforts to eradicate them would represent a step towards equal status for women.

37. In almost all countries, whatever their stage of economic development, women tended to be concentrated at the lower end of the employment structure, and the most vulnerable groups were even more easily exploited. In order to increase the economic participation of women, they must be assured of equal access to training, equal treatment and equal pay, and have broader access to support services, particularly child care, family planning and labour-saving technology.

38. The underrepresentation of women in decision-making and in political life, which would be taken up at the interregional seminar in Vienna in September 1991, was also of major concern to his delegation.

39. The overall goal was to ensure greater social justice, thus allowing the economic potential of all countries to be better utilized, especially in developing regions. There had been much discussion in 1990 of possible "peace dividends". It might also be useful to consider an "equality dividend". The establishment of a more dynamic and more just society would help put an end to the cost of growing inequality, to the loss of potential resources for economic and social development, to environmental degradation and to deterioration of the social fabric. His delegation wished to underscore the key element of such an evolution: the political will to make it a reality.

40. Mrs. GRES (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic), speaking on agenda item 101, said that despite the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, women were far from actually enjoying equal rights. That was particularly true for the most vulnerable groups - single women, elderly women, women with disabilities, and migrant women - whose numbers were growing everywhere because of political instability, including in the Soviet Union.

41. Two categories of closely related priority problems could be identified: (a) ecological problems and (b) protection of children against violence, alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution and AIDS.

42. Each era had its problems; the end of the twentieth century would be known for ecological catastrophes, which often resulted from misuse of technological progress in military or industrial fields. That was a particularly painful question for the Byelorussian SSR because of the Chernobyl accident, but no one could remain indifferent, because there were many nuclear plants in the world whose security could never be 100 per cent guaranteed. Nuclear weapons represented an even more serious danger. For that reason an international movement against nuclear testing had been formed.

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(Mrs. Gres, Byelorussian SSR)

43. In July 1990, the Byelorussian Parliament had declared the Republic a denuclearized zone. She would not want other women to live through the same anxiety as Byelorussian mothers. In the irradiated areas, the proportion of deformed newborns was 1.5 to 2 times above normal. For many years to come, Byelorussian women would hesitate to have children. Pathological changes in lymphocyte genotypes were 3.5 to 4.5 times more frequent in women living in contaminated areas than those living in safe areas. It was expected that in 30 years (one generation) 1.5 to 3 tonnes per inhabitant of other, equally mutagenic toxic agents would be added to the nuclear radiation. Genetic problems would be likely to affect several generations of Byelorussians.

44. In January 1990, the Byelorussian Women's League had been founded, demonstrating the growing importance of the United Nations Development Fund for Women. In addition to attempting to alleviate the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe, the League was fighting against drug addiction, alcoholism, smoking and prostitution, was working for a rebirth of national consciousness and for the cultural development of Byelorussians and other nationalities living in the Byelorussian SSR, and was calling for the organization of a professional army and forms of national service other than military service.

45. For those initiatives to bear fruit, the United Nations had to support the development of national machinery designed to achieve the effective participation of women at all levels of decision-making, whether on regional or on universal questions.

46. The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic welcomed the Austrian offer with regard to the world conference on women (A/C.3/45/5).

47. Mrs. MIGNOTTI (Jamaica) said that since the advancement of women was an essential factor in achieving economic growth and social well-being, no society could sustain for very long a less than optimum utilization of that half of the planet's human resources.

48. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies continued to be the principal framework for action to advance the status of women up to the year 2000, and were a reminder to Governments of the political commitment which they had made with regard to women in approving them.

49. Quite apart from the fact that cultural traditions and the level of resources could slow down the action of certain Governments in that area, there was still entrenched resistance to women's advancement, a cause which the economic crisis of the 1980s had already somewhat pushed into the background. The preparatory work for the 1995 world conference on women should help in pointing the way to the approach for the remainder of the Decade, bearing in mind the changing world economic, political and social scenario and the experience gained since 1985.

(Mrs. Mignott, Jamaica)

50. The Commission on the Status of Women had undertaken the five-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Strategies at its thirty-fourth session. That had enabled it to reach a number of conclusions with regard to the areas deserving of priority attention. Emphasis should be placed on: (1) the role of education in reducing stereotyping of women's roles in society and in providing women with the skills necessary for economic and political integration; (2) renewing efforts to eliminate disparities in pay between men and women on the basis of the principle of equal pay for equal output, including measurement of the economic value of women's unpaid work; (3) ensuring better representation of women in economic and political decision-making, where women were significantly underrepresented at the present time; and (4) stressing the important role that women had to play in preserving the environment.

51. The national machinery played a pivotal role in ensuring that women's concerns were incorporated in national policies. Its efficient functioning required the support of the Government in terms of increased staffing and funds.

52. With regard to the recruitment of women to the Secretariat of the United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/45/548) revealed that in June 1990, women accounted for 28.3 per cent of the staff in posts subject to geographical distribution, whereas the General Assembly had recommended that the level should be raised to 30 per cent by the end of 1990. Jamaica appreciated the interaction between the Secretariat and the Missions on that question, through the establishment of focal points in Missions. That type of initiative had to be pursued, so that women could occupy a greater number of high-level posts and enjoy better career and promotion prospects.

53. Jamaica thanked the Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, whose interesting presentation had illustrated the role played by the Fund in promoting projects of benefit to women or involving women in their management and execution.

54. The tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to be celebrated in 1991, would give countries an opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to the principles of the Convention, or to accede to it. As a State party to the Convention, Jamaica reaffirmed the guiding principle of its own Constitution, which guaranteed fundamental rights and freedoms for all without distinction based on gender or any other grounds. Her Government was striving towards implementation of the following four principles: (1) all policies of the Government must reflect a recognition of the equal and complementary partnership of women and men; (2) economic and social development policies and programmes must provide for equal access to resources for both men and women; (3) in policy planning, special consideration must be given to the multiple responsibilities of women, both as income-earners and in the household, in particular of those who were sole supporters of their families; (4) special measures must be developed to compensate for historic and current disadvantages experienced by women. The Bureau of Women's Affairs of Jamaica had been established in 1974 and operated in close contact with women's organizations, and

(Mrs. Mignott, Jamaica)

with the ministries of Government through an inter-ministerial committee established to pursue, at the level of each ministry, the goal of incorporating women in all aspects of national life. Jamaica wished to stress that regional and cross-regional co-operation between governmental and non-governmental groups was a valuable means of promoting change and strengthening common bonds on behalf of women's advancement.

55. Mrs. PELLICER (Mexico) noted that while the appraisal of the first five years of the United Nations Decade for Women had merited a World Conference which had caught the attention of international public opinion, the report on the review and appraisal of the first five years of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies had been submitted in 1990 only to the Commission on the Status of Women (E/1990/25) and had made only a very modest impact, which pointed to a diminished awareness of the obstacles that still stood in the way of the advancement of women.

56. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Strategies (A/45/489) painted a gloomy picture of the status of women. It reported that while de jure equality might have advanced, de facto equality was coming only slowly. The extended resistance to women's advancement and the reduction of resources available for change, together with the world economic situation in the late 1980s had resulted in a loss of impetus and even stagnation in some areas. It was thus necessary both to apply those recommendations which would be likely to improve the pace of implementation of the Strategies and to study the obstacles to their implementation.

57. Mexico was particularly interested in those recommendations dealing with women and development, notably those covering the problems of concern to the largest sectors of the world's female population, on which particular emphasis would have to be laid in the years to come, namely, the effects of structural readjustments on the status of women, feminization of poverty, and the health and nutrition of women.

58. The structural readjustments which most developing countries had carried out to meet the economic crisis of the 1980s had had adverse socio-economic effects on the situation of women. There was therefore an urgent need to take measures to combat those negative effects, for example by giving women easier access to credit, productive inputs, markets and decision-making.

59. With regard to feminization of poverty, it had to be pointed out that the number of women living in dire poverty, far from going down, had increased considerably over the past few years. It was thus important to promote educational and training activities to provide women with productive activities so as to break the troubling vicious circle.

60. Since the beginning of the 1980s, a deterioration in the health and nutrition of women had been taking place in many parts of the developing world. That particularly alarming situation had repercussions for neonatal health and for infant survival. Mexico appealed once again for the improvement of the health of women by the year 2000 to be made a priority, by the provision to them of appropriate and accessible health services.

(Mrs. Pellicer, Mexico)

61. The world conference on women to be held in 1995 had to be prepared with the greatest care, since it could help to mobilize governmental and non-governmental organizations responsible for the advancement of women. Such mobilization would be especially important as it would make it possible to bring the problems to the attention of parts of the world which had not had an opportunity to host a world conference.

62. On the matter of preparations for the conference, she hoped that the mistake would not be made again of basing the documentation on questionnaires that were so technical that the countries to which they were addressed had to be helped to answer them, including countries with quite advanced national machinery for dealing with women's problems. She therefore repeated the appeal of the Economic and Social Council that, in drawing up the second five-year report, in addition to country reports, the analyses of statistical data produced by United Nations bodies as well as other governmental and non-governmental bodies should be taken into consideration.

63. The Forward-looking Strategies should be the basis of the conference's agenda. Room would, of course, have to be made for new concerns, such as women and the environment or women and the process of economic and political liberalization, while at the same time retaining the useful frame of reference constituted by the three major themes of equality, development and peace.

64. Her delegation was surprised at the scope of the terms of reference apparently to be assigned to the interregional consultation on women in public life, as a "preparatory activity to the 1995 world conference". Her delegation would like further details of the recommendation authorizing that consultation and the arrangements for participation by Member States.

65. Turning to the report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, she said that, in all, the Committee had examined 58 initial reports and 11 second periodic reports. The membership of the Committee had enabled it to analyse the many ways in which the Convention was implemented in the various countries, and to review frankly and in detail the various substantive questions posed by its full implementation, in particular that of article 21, to which the Committee referred in chapter IV of its report to the General Assembly (A/45/38). Thus, the Committee had formulated two general recommendations of great importance to the situation of women in the area of health and child care, concerning such traditional practices as female circumcision, which had serious health and other consequences for women and children, and the need to avoid any discrimination against women, even implicit, in the implementation of strategies for the prevention and control of AIDS.

66. The international community should strengthen its support for the Committee so that it could review the reports of States Parties at the proper time.

(Mrs. Pellicer, Mexico)

67. The position of women in the United Nations Secretariat continued to be a matter of great concern. The Secretary-General's report on the matter showed no real change in participation by women, especially at the senior and intermediate levels, and particularly in the specialized agencies. It was all very well to ask countries to nominate candidates for vacant posts, but that did not imply a commitment and a political will to end the discrimination against women at various levels.

68. She noted that the Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women had succeeded in restructuring the administrative and financial management of UNIFEM. The Fund's resources had been increased, which was a proof of confidence on the part of donors and also in part the result of the new policy of mobilizing finance, but they were still modest.

69. UNIFEM would therefore be well-advised to concentrate for the time being on programmes with a multiplier effect, on avoiding duplication, particularly in regard to research, and on organizing major South-South co-operation activities. Often the developing countries were unable to make large financial contributions but could give other countries the benefit of their experience in collaboration with UNIFEM. The Fund was the only United Nations body which had received as part of its explicit terms of reference the provision of financial and technical support for the participation of women in all aspects of the development process by facilitating access to resources that rendered such participation more effective. She urged the Director of the Fund to continue her efforts to improve its effectiveness.

70. Ms. ENGMAN (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the five Nordic countries, recalled that, despite the efforts of the United Nations system to improve the status of women, including the convening of three world conferences since 1975, the Commission on the Status of Women had revealed, when it undertook the five year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies at its thirty-fourth session (E/1990/25), that that implementation had encountered obstacles both at the Member State level and within the United Nations system. In other words, although the situation was evolving - which was inevitable since society needed to take all its resources into consideration in order to further development - such changes were very slow. In some areas, progress towards equality of opportunity for men and women was at a standstill, in particular in the field of education. Moreover, a feminization of poverty was being experienced in both developing and developed countries.

71. The Nordic countries were glad that the Commission on the Status of Women had been able to reach a consensus to the effect that the Economic and Social Council should adopt a document containing a set of recommendations to accelerate the process of implementing the Strategies. They reaffirmed their commitment to preserve the spirit of consensus already reached at the Nairobi Conference. They remained convinced that the United Nations must serve as a model for all aspects of the implementation of the Strategies, especially the participation of women in development.

(Ms. Engman, Sweden)

72. Year after year, the General Assembly had reaffirmed its determination to increase the number of women in the Secretariat. It must be recognized, however, that the goal of having 30 per cent of the posts subject to geographical distribution occupied by women by the end of 1990 would not be reached. Moreover, the Secretary-General's report on the matter (A/45/548) showed that women were traditionally recruited for lower-level positions. She believed it was important to institute a fair recruitment policy for posts in all categories, and senior-level posts in particular. The Secretary-General should take immediate steps to remedy the situation and Governments should present more women candidates. It was also important to try to recruit men to the categories where women were in the majority. It was imperative to achieve by the end of 1995, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/3, a rate of participation by women of 35 per cent, without prejudice to the principle of equitable geographical distribution of posts. In that connection, the Nordic countries welcomed the Secretariat initiative whereby Permanent Missions in New York would be invited to nominate a member of their staff as a focal point for women's questions, as well as the idea of establishing a network of focal points in every department and office in the Secretariat. They believed it was important for senior officers to be nominated for such posts, both in the Secretariat and at the Permanent Missions.

73. As far as increasing participation by women in United Nations peace-keeping and peace-making operations was concerned, the Nordic countries could not subscribe to the scenario described in paragraph 19 of the Secretary-General's report, whereby men would be sent out to participate in missions while women would remain at Headquarters where they would have "opportunities" to "demonstrate their abilities to perform higher-level jobs". Apparently the reverse situation never arose.

74. Regarding the distribution of women by region of origin, the Nordic countries would like Member States and the Secretariat to give women from Central and Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East an opportunity to participate on an equal footing with women from other regions in the work of the Secretariat. Moreover, Member States should, in accordance with the Forward-looking Strategies, give women more opportunity to participate in decision-making both at the national level and within the Organization.

75. The convening of a world conference on women could help to keep the issue of improving their situation constantly on the agenda, both nationally and internationally, since by giving questions concerning women greater visibility the conference would encourage Member States to implement measures to improve the situation of women and to report on them. The Nordic countries therefore supported the convening of a fourth world conference in 1995. The Commission on the Status of Women should be designated as its preparatory body. The Nordic countries themselves were currently discussing the convening of a Nordic regional conference in 1994, as a follow-up to the Nordic Forum held in 1988. The new Forum would serve as the regional preparatory body for the 1995 international conference and would give the Nordic countries an opportunity to exchange experience and put forward their views.

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76. The issue of women and the environment would be on the agenda of the 1992 session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Nordic countries saw a close link between that fact and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development which would be held the same year.

77. With respect to the work done by the Nordic countries to provide equal opportunities for men and women, she pointed out the importance of the measures to be taken to facilitate a combination of gainful employment and family life for women. The Nordic countries felt that it was indispensable to respect the principle of equal pay for equal work.

78. Regarding the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, it had sometimes been difficult to persuade States parties to the Convention to submit their initial reports and their second periodic reports. Furthermore, a considerable number of countries had entered many substantive reservations when acceding to the Convention and the Nordic countries urged them to withdraw those reservations.

79. The Nordic countries wished to highlight the importance of the general recommendation adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (A/45/38), regarding the circumcision of women. They urged those countries which had not already done so to adhere to the Convention.

80. Mrs. SHERMAN-PETER (Bahamas) said that she regarded the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Forward-looking Strategies adopted by the Nairobi Conference as the most substantial initiatives that had been adopted to translate the legal and constitutional equality of both sexes into a social, economic and political reality. Her delegation had taken note with interest of the review and appraisal of the first five years of implementation of the Strategies on which the Commission on the Status of Women had embarked at its forty-fourth session; her delegation found, however, that the recommendations concerning the immediate measures to be taken, in such areas as education, the economic sector, and economic and political decision-making, to remove the main obstacles to the application of the Strategies were more instructional. The benefits of those collective efforts focusing on the advancement of women would certainly be maximized if Governments would give due regard to those recommendations. The priority themes for the period 1993-1996, which the Commission on the Status of Women had included in its report (E/1990/25), would facilitate identification of those areas where action was required.

81. Her delegation was particularly interested in the subject of "Vulnerable women, including migrant women", which would be discussed at the thirty-fifth session of the Commission because there was a growing number of women in the Bahamas who were single heads of households. The proportion had increased from 20 per cent in 1950 to 40 per cent in 1990 and could be explained by various factors, such as teenage pregnancy, marital dissolution and single parenting by choice. Present realities imposed an obligation on States to place certain questions high on their agendas: child care, teenage pregnancy, equal pay for equal work and social support services. The conclusions of the group of experts

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that would meet in Vienna (Austria) in November 1990 and those of the Commission on the Status of Women should facilitate policy planning and decision-making in those areas.

82. Concerning the second priority theme (national, regional and international machinery for the integration of women in the development process), those national mechanisms which had a key role to play were often still not very effective. Thought should, therefore, be given to determining how best they could be improved to enable them to discharge their duties successfully. As far as the Bahamas was concerned, it had diversified and strengthened the co-ordinating, consultation and information functions of the Women's Desk which had now become the Women's Unit and was anxious that the conclusions of the Commission on strengthening national mechanisms would enable it to improve or strengthen its work even more.

83. The Bahamas felt that the issue of refugee and displaced women and children had been appropriately chosen as the third priority theme. The Commission might perhaps also wish to take a decision on the situation of women who migrated for economic reasons and did not really fall within any of the categories provided.

84. Preparations for the world conference on women, to be held in Austria in 1995, should be both national and regional. It had already been agreed that regional preparatory meetings would be held in 1993 and 1994 for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia. The preparatory work could even begin as early as 1991, within the framework of the regular session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the interregional consultation on women in public life, scheduled to be held in Vienna in September 1991.

85. The limited involvement of women in political and public life was certainly an obstacle to their general advancement. Strategies should, therefore, be devised to increase that involvement. Governments and political parties had been preparing women to play a role in political life at the highest levels. In her country 3 of the 16 senators, 2 of the 49 members of Parliament and 1 junior minister were women.

86. The interregional consultation was to prepare an agenda for political action during the first half of the decade, that would mobilize all women to participate actively in the political process. However, it should broaden its scope of study to include all aspects of policy-making and decision-making from the grass-roots level upwards. It would have its greatest impact if it were attended by high-level officials representing a broad spectrum of political ideas and decision-making activities. The deliberations of the group of experts to meet in May 1991 in Vienna would be crucial to the success of the consultation. As many countries as possible (and especially developing countries) should participate in the consultation and its work should be given the requisite public information and media support.

87. Her delegation noted that, despite the administrative efforts and the emergency measures taken, the target of 30 per cent women in posts subject to geographical distribution in the United Nations Secretariat by 1990 had not been

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met. Significant gains had been made in the lower levels of the hierarchy but virtually none at the senior decision-making level. The mechanism for recruiting women to the Secretariat should be reviewed and a concerted effort made to recruit women at the senior levels in order to reach the 35 per cent target set for women by 1995.

88. Her delegation was pleased to note that a large number of seminars, meetings and expert groups had been organized to provide guidance and information on issues concerning women and pointed out that the Bahamas National Women's Conference scheduled to be held in November-December 1990 on the topic of "Women and AIDS" would certainly benefit from the work of the seminar recently held in Vienna on that subject.

89. Her delegation also commended UNIFEM and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women for the work they had done in involving women in the development process, because such work was particularly useful in the developing countries.

90. As the result of a determined policy, the Bahamian Government had succeeded in ensuring equal participation of women in both education and employment.

91. Mrs. JAHAN (Bangladesh) said that her delegation had studied with interest the report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (A/45/489). She observed that a huge gap still persisted between awareness and implementation as well as between official pronouncements and traditional attitudes. Bangladesh supported the recommendations made on that subject by the Commission on the Status of Women and hoped that they would determine the measures to be taken in the areas of women's education, employment and participation in decision-making.

92. It was at the national level that the status and role of women could best be advanced. Her Government had endeavoured to integrate women into the mainstream development process both as agents and as beneficiaries. The Ministry of Women's Affairs co-ordinated national policies and programmes concerning women, and the national development plans were based on a multisectoral approach to women's development. The major focus of the Government's efforts was to reduce imbalances in education, health and employment, with priority attention to the special needs of disabled, destitute and socially handicapped women. Since 1990, education for girls up to a certain level was provided free of charge. Other measures had been taken for girls who were the only child in the family, and for women primary-school teachers. Women were also a major target group under the programme "Health for all by the year 2000".

93. The share of women in the country's labour force was very small, which was why employment quotas had been fixed and the age-limit for entry into government service extended. Career women's hostels and day-care centres for the children of working mothers had been opened to encourage women to enter non-traditional employment. In Bangladesh, 85 per cent of women lived in rural areas. Their

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welfare was therefore an important element in the rural development programme. Bangladesh had introduced innovative credit schemes such as the Grameen Bank, which successfully assisted women in undertaking income-generating activities.

94. The Government had enacted legislation to improve the status of women, but the law could only set guidelines and could not change attitudes. It was there that the media had a decisive role to play. Gender-biased stereotypes should also be removed from teaching, a task to which the Government had committed itself. Moreover, there was a crucial need for "legal literacy" among women, and to that effect Bangladesh had introduced free advisory services for women who were unaware of their legal rights or too poor to pay for litigation expenses.

95. The difficulties encountered by women had been further accentuated by the deterioration of the economic situation. Experience showed that social programmes were the first to suffer from economic adjustment, and that women bore the brunt of such cut-backs. Fortunately, the socio-economic impact was increasingly being scrutinized, and development programmes at the international level were giving priority to the advancement of women. The Programme of Action of the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in Paris from 3 to 14 September 1990, contained recommendations on the full integration of women in the development process. Similarly, the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Decade for Development before the General Assembly contained provisions on women under the item of human resources development. Bangladesh regretted, however, that the issue of women in development did not feature as a separate priority item in the Strategy.

96. In future, global programmes of action should explicitly address women's concerns. In that regard, the inclusion of an item on women and the environment in the agenda of the thirty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women was a welcome development. The Commission might formulate useful recommendations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development scheduled for 1992. Bangladesh also hoped that the International Year of the Family would provide an opportunity for particular attention to be given to the concerns of women as members of the family, especially the issue of domestic violence.

97. Bangladesh considered that Governments must play the central role in implementing programmes and strategies adopted at the international level. However, they could not succeed without concerted action at both the regional and global levels. The United Nations system, especially the Commission on the Status of Women, would continue to contribute usefully to women's advancement. The activities of WHO, FAO, UNFPA, UNICEF, ILO, UNESCO and UNDP were also commendable, although system-wide co-ordination and planning should be strengthened. The International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women had also initiated important research and training programmes, and it was to be hoped that the Institute would give priority to programmes to be established in the least developed countries. Bangladesh welcomed UNIFEM's innovative strategies in promoting women's integration in development in the developing countries and the valuable assistance it had received, especially in the upliftment of rural women.

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98. The priority themes to be discussed by the Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-fifth session must address the causes of the particular vulnerability of disabled, elderly, migrant and refugee women. Bangladesh hoped that the expert group on vulnerable women, scheduled to meet at Vienna in November 1990, would adequately address that issue.

99. On the subject of development, it was particularly important to examine ways of strengthening national machinery in the developing countries; its effectiveness depended largely on the availability of financial and human resources. In Bangladesh, a National Council for Women's Development would soon be set up to monitor the multisectoral women's development programmes in co-ordination with the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

100. In some regions a radical change in the political situation was necessary for the advancement of women living in situations of armed conflict, foreign occupation and racial discrimination, and of those who were "refugees in their own homes". Urgent action must be taken to assist women suffering under apartheid in South Africa and women living in the territories occupied by Israel.

101. Mrs. NDIAYE (Senegal), Minister for the Status of Women and Children, recalled that in February 1988 Senegal had submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women its first report which was being updated and provided the background to the action taken until 1987 to ensure the legal protection and social and economic advancement of women.

102. The principle of de facto equality, affirmed in the Constitution of Senegal, was also included in the Family Code, the Social Security Code, the General Civil Service Statute and the Educational Policy Act. Senegal's will to recognize equality of the sexes had prompted it to ratify or accede to all international conventions on the specific rights of women, from the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women of Full Age (Geneva, 11 October 1933) to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

103. However, at the social and family level, a number of restrictions to the principle of equality had been brought to the attention of the competent authorities. Accordingly, article 154 of the Family Code, which authorized a husband to oppose his wife's professional activity if the interests of the family so warranted, and article 436 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which prevented a wife from claiming her own property when it had been confiscated together with that of her husband at their principal place of residence, had been repealed in February 1989. Article 152 of the Family Code, whereby the husband was the head of the family and entitled to determine the couple's place of residence, remained in force; although it was indeed contrary to article 16 of the Convention, it was assumed that, where full employment of women existed enabling them to participate financially in household expenses, that article would be deemed obsolete. In order to strengthen the protection of women, action had also been taken against forced marriages [a woman married under 16 years of age could claim the marriage to be null and void (art. 142)] and against repudiations [the husband could be required

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to pay alimony (art. 162)]. Moreover, in the event of marriage, a Senegalese woman did not lose her original nationality and foreign women were not obliged to opt for Senegalese nationality. When custody of a child was granted to a woman, she could continue to compel the father to contribute to maintenance of the child (arts. 289 to 292).

104. On the subject of political rights, de jure equality existed since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1956. In regard to employment and economic rights, the protection of women was ensured (regulation of night work, prohibition of dismissal during sickness and maternity leave, full payment of wages during maternity leave). The Labour Code guaranteed equal access by men and women to all jobs and equal pay for equal work, a principle that was strictly applied in the public administration but to a lesser extent in the military and in the private sector, which was primarily concerned with profitability.

105. It must nevertheless be recognized that socio-cultural obstacles (prejudices or stereotypes) persisted, and that women, having been integrated more recently into the educational sector, were less competitive for certain jobs. Moreover, women often were unaware of legal provisions in their favour. For that reason, the Senegalese Government had made a special effort to disseminate the texts, particularly to rural populations, as part of a national functional literacy programme.

106. With regard to agenda item 102, she said that education was one of the sectors that had made the most progress in the 1980s. School enrolment was estimated at 56.4 per cent for children of both sexes aged 7 to 12. Overall, the number of female students had doubled at all levels and had tripled in secondary education between 1977/78 and 1988/89. The Senegalese Government's objective was to maintain parity between the sexes throughout the school system by measures to reduce drop-outs, especially among girls (as a result of early marriages or family social or economic pressures). The fact that the heads of secondary schools were no longer allowed to expel unwed mothers would assist that effort, as would the distribution of textbooks and school supplies without charge to all public educational institutions, enacted by the State in 1989. The number of female students in higher education had also greatly increased, particularly in the fields of medicine and pharmacy and at the National Higher College of Technology.

107. Those figures should not divert attention from the approximately 80 per cent of Senegalese women who were illiterate. Although pilot programmes to eliminate illiteracy had been undertaken in the context of development projects, Senegal was still far from its objective of a national programme to combat illiteracy. For that reason, it had decided in 1989 to incorporate functional literacy training in all future development projects for women.

108. In the employment sector, women had represented 26 per cent of civil servants in 1989 and had progressed at all levels of public administration, as a result of improved educational preparation for girls and of legislation banning employment discrimination against women, in terms of both access to employment and opportunities for promotion.

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109. In the political sphere, the majority party reserved 25 per cent of all posts for women, in all offices except the Political Office, where the figure was only 10 per cent. Despite those encouraging developments, it must be noted that there were still few women in decision-making posts.

110. It also could not be ignored that the great majority of women belonged to the informal sector of the economy, which was poorly managed and received little recognition even though it played an essential role in providing for the needs of the population.

111. The improvement of women's participation in agriculture and production was less apparent, despite the introduction of new equipment and new services (such as access to agricultural inputs and to credit, supervisory and extension services, and participation of women in rural councils). The National Federation of Groups for the Advancement of Women was a member of the advisory group established by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to promote co-operation with non-governmental organizations, and would soon be represented on the Board of Directors of the National Agricultural Credit Bank. The efforts of the Senegalese Government and of women themselves had been hampered by the vicissitudes of rainfall, on which agriculture depended, and by the decrease in farm income.

112. On the basis of its experience, Senegal formulated three recommendations: (1) To encourage women to take charge of their own problems, and to provide upstream the necessary means to trigger and sustain the process; (2) At the macro-economic level, to give priority to the integration of women into the major development activities, in the context of participatory development; and (3) To strengthen government machinery for the advancement of women, which had been weakened in recent years by budgetary constraints, as well as grass-roots women's organizations.

113. The reorganization of the Administration in March 1990 had provided an opportunity for the appointment of a Deputy Minister dealing with the status of women and children, reporting to the President of the Republic. A study conducted in 1988 by national experts financed by UNIFEM had shown that the best way to integrate women into the economic and social development of the country would be: (1) to establish national machinery for designing and directing the entire national policy on the advancement of women, and for evaluating and supervising the implementation of sectoral programmes administered by other technical departments of the Government; and (2) to appoint staff to all the technical ministerial departments who would see that each department included a women's component in the process of economic and social development. The Deputy Minister was assisted in his task by a cabinet of experts and an interministerial committee to monitor the policy for the advancement of women and children. In addition to those arrangements, a national advisory commission on the status of women and children had been established, as well as a sub-commission on the integration of women.

114. The structural adjustment programme instituted in 1983 should bring about a medium-term increase in real per capita income, which would not, however, be uniformly distributed among the various socio-economic groups, especially in the

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short term. It should have beneficial consequences for incomes in the rural sector, but it was expected that the reduction of salaries, along with the restructuring of enterprises, the reform of the banking sector and the liberalization of the economy, would cause a decline in employment opportunities and real incomes. While the consumer price index had virtually quintupled between 1970 and 1989, incomes had practically stagnated. The repercussions of those conditions on women were threefold: firstly, budgetary constraints were limiting the State's ability to invest in the social sectors; secondly, the restructuring of businesses in the secondary and tertiary sectors had led to a loss of employment for many women (and sometimes for their spouses as well); thirdly, the family budget was being increasingly eroded. To counteract the transitory adverse effects of the adjustment, the Senegalese Government had established a human resources development programme in which women occupied a central place.

115. It was also essential that institutions which dealt with questions relating to women (UNDP, UNIFEM, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, the United Nations Capital Development Fund, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, United Nations agencies and continental, subregional and bilateral co-operation organizations) should be sustained. That necessity was one which the international community (particularly the World Bank) should clearly understand.

116. The Senegalese Government had invited the fifth Regional Conference of African Women to meet in Senegal in 1994 to evaluate the implementation, at the regional level, of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, and to prepare for the world conference on women to be held in 1995. Senegal had taken note of Austria's offer to host the conference.

117. In spite of all obstacles, Senegal was determined to continue to apply the Forward-looking Strategies and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.