



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 28th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HAMER (Netherlands)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

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AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued) (A/41/3,  
chap. V, sect. C)

1. Mr. FAROUQUE (Sri Lanka) said that global enthusiasm for the promotion of the status of women had progressively gathered momentum since the adoption of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. The theme "Equality, Development and Peace" and the sub-themes, "Employment, Health and Education", were currently being promoted at the national, regional and international levels. Through the implementation of medium-term plans, the Strategies were being integrated into the programmes of the United Nations system.

2. At its previous session, the Commission on the Status of Women had made progress in implementing the Strategies. In that connection, Sri Lanka wished to reiterate its support for the concern of the non-aligned countries over the role of women in development, as reflected in the Harare Declaration. In addition, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) had done much to promote the exchange of information and the transfer of knowledge among women from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. As women's issues were an integral part of socio-economic development, they should be accorded priority, even in the face of the current financial crisis.

(Mr. Farouque, Sri Lanka)

3. It was the policy of his Government to integrate women into the overall development process. A Women's Bureau had been established in 1978, and a Ministry of Women's Affairs and Teaching Hospitals in 1983. Free education in Sri Lanka had made it possible for women to enter new areas of employment. The literacy rate among women was 84 per cent, and the number of women in the educational system was equal to the number of men. Women also occupied high-level ministerial positions. Moreover, Sri Lanka would participate actively in efforts by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to incorporate the interests of women in its work programme.

4. Since Sri Lanka had taken many initiatives to ensure the rights of rural and poor urban women, it welcomed the catalytic and innovative role of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in that area. His delegation hoped that States parties would follow the guidelines for submitting reports under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in order to rationalize the work of the Committee dealing with that question at a time of financial crisis.

5. In conclusion, Sri Lanka was pleased that 90 States had acceded to the Convention and appealed to other Member States to become parties to it.

6. Mr. LIM (Malaysia) said that women constituted an active force in economic progress and the satisfaction of social and cultural needs. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies had given added impetus to the women's programme of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). In January 1986, Malaysia had played host to the 5th meeting of the ASEAN Women's Programme (AWP) which had stressed the need for diversification in the training of women, to give them the knowledge needed for modern-day technology.

7. His country had taken part in ASEAN projects on legal aid and legal literacy, a parents' movement for drug abuse prevention and development of women's resources which were designed to speed up implementation of the objectives of the United Nations Decade for Women.

8. His delegation had studied the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Strategies (A/41/623), and had noted with appreciation the role played by non-governmental organizations in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 40/108. Non-governmental organizations would have a far-reaching role in the advancement of women world-wide. They had played an extensive role in efforts to achieve the objectives of ASEAN.

9. During the International Year of Peace, women should play an important role in the promotion of peace, beginning with the home environment and more generally, in society. That role could be evolved in the context of the Forward-looking Strategies.

10. In South-East Asia, as a result of modern technology, rural young women were pouring into the urban areas, in search of employment in the highly specialized electronics industry. Many aspects of modern industry contrasted sharply with their rural life-styles making it difficult for them to adjust, and many new factory workers resigned as a result. Such problems had become widespread, not

(Mr. Lim, Malaysia)

only in Malaysia, but in other developing countries as well. Malaysia therefore welcomed the establishment of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Co-operation between UNIFEM and AWP would be a constructive step towards the achievement of the Fund's objectives in South-East Asia.

11. The magnitude of the problems faced by women in modern society had been lessened considerably as a result of efforts by the international community, and most importantly, the United Nations. It was imperative that any definition of development should include provisions for the concerns and participation of women at the national, regional and international levels.

12. Ms. GJIKI (Albania) said that the goals of the Mexico, Copenhagen and Nairobi Conferences had not materialized. Inequality between men and women was increasing. Women were still the objects of discrimination and lived in anxiety about the future of their children. Thousands of women lived below the subsistence level. In many countries, they were underpaid on the job and under-represented in political life. The family as an important unit in society was deteriorating.

13. It was impossible to say that the objectives of the United Nations Decade for Women were any closer to being attained when Palestinian women lived in refugee camps, banished from their homeland. As if that were not enough, the Zionist aggressors, as a form of reprisal, had continued to enter the camps and kill thousands of innocent women and children in their sleep. There was much talk of international terrorism, but not a word had been uttered against the terrorism that had been practised for decades against the whole Palestinian nation.

14. In South Africa, women represented the most oppressed segment of the black population. In Namibia and South Africa, the mortality of both mothers and children had reached staggering proportions. In many parts of the African continent, mothers had nothing to feed their children and had to stand by helplessly and watch them die.

15. Equality, development and peace could not be attained while inequality, backwardness and the threat of war were a glaring reality. The struggle of women was taking place against a background of general tension and conflict in the world. The blame lay with the two super-Powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, which filled the earth, seas and outer space with weapons to exterminate mankind.

16. Albania reaffirmed its solidarity with progressive women the world over who aspired to freedom and genuine equality. In Albania, women had participated, alongside men, in the national liberation struggle and in the construction of a socialist nation. The participation of women in Albanian society had not interfered in their role as mothers and wives. On the contrary, women had perfected that role with the experience they gained in their daily occupations. Thirty-five per cent of the population was under 15 years of age, testifying to the fact that Albanian women were giving birth to, and raising, devoted members of a socialist society. Socialism had made it possible for those women to enjoy both economic independence and the right to choose their lifetime companions freely.

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17. Mr. ZAWACKI (Poland) said that the Commission on the Status of Women was a forum where women themselves could define their role in development. The Commission's work capacity might be increased by expanding its membership or holding special sessions when necessary. An effective monitoring and reviewing system should be established, covering all the main aspects of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. Government reports on implementation of the Strategies should be submitted every five years, and regular world conferences should be held to assess progress at all levels. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) could play a major part in protecting women's rights at the national level.

18. In Poland, the proportion of women in the working population has grown very rapidly since the Second World War. Men and women enjoyed equal rights in economic, political and social life, with equal access to education and vocational training. The Government's main priority was to help women to combine their work with their family responsibilities. Women were still a minority among senior administrators and managers, even in occupations such as teaching and the health professions, where women outnumbered men. The Government had taken into account the role and potential of women in its national plans and local development programmes. It sought to harmonize women's productive and reproductive roles and maintain support services.

19. Peace was a prerequisite for the development and stability of the family. Women could and should play a significant role in increasing world peace and security. The United Nations bodies responsible for the advancement of women should participate in the activities of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations connected with the International Year of Peace. Resources should be made available to encourage participation of women in promoting international peace and co-operation.

20. Mr. ORTIZ (Uruguay) said that the objectives of the United Nations Decade for Women - equality, development and peace - were interrelated. The concept of equality was particularly important, as it embraced the principles set forth in the United Nations Charter.

21. Since the beginning of time, women had been making slow but steady progress. However, in the twentieth century, particularly in recent decades, the pace had quickened, and women were rapidly acceding to the same rights and responsibilities as men. Partly because it was inevitable and partly through their own efforts, women had undeniably acquired a greater role in the affairs of nations.

22. The status of women was closely linked to economic progress and development. At the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women, held at Nairobi, it had been indicated that the prospects for the developing world were bleak. Particularly in the low-income and least developed countries, the unfavourable economic situation would have repercussions on the status of women.

(Mr. Ortiz, Uruguay)

23. In its deliberations on women, the United Nations had at times adopted too broad an approach. Certain social issues, such as illiteracy or life expectancy, were vital to the whole human race, irrespective of sex. Identifying them solely as means of helping women amounted to discrimination in reverse. Similarly, political and economic obstacles to the integration of women in society were universal in nature.

24. Under Uruguayan legislation, there was virtually no discrimination against women. Men and women enjoyed equal civil rights, voting rights and family rights. Efforts were being made to bring national legislation into conformity with the norms set by the International Labour Organisation and the United Nations. On 3 November 1986 the Conference on Women, Population and Development in Latin America would be held in Montevideo.

25. While the Committee had made equality between men and women one of its principal goals, women in Uruguay had traditionally enjoyed preferential treatment in certain areas. That was particularly true with respect to the family and social security.

26. The consideration of women's issues in the United Nations had produced an abundance of documentation, but "progress on paper" and genuine progress were not the same. What really mattered was the adoption of a new mentality in the family and in the schools. In that way, equality and non-discrimination would not have to be taught to future generations, for those concepts would seem perfectly natural to them.

27. Mr. ABOU-HADID (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his country had participated in the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. It looked forward to translating the Nairobi Strategies into practical reality and to taking positive and constructive steps to improve the status of women. The Strategies, since they were adopted by consensus, had laid a solid foundation for the formulation of the principles necessary for women's equality.

28. While his country had been gratified by the results of the Conference, many women had nevertheless been disappointed that those parts of its report referring to the situation of women under apartheid, Palestinian women and Syrian women in the occupied Golan Heights could not be adopted by consensus because of the opposition of Israel and certain Western countries. The claim that such matters bore no relation to the topic of the Conference because they were of a political nature was in conflict with the facts and with the principles on which the Conference had been based. The situation of women under occupation and under apartheid should rather have been given first priority in the deliberations.

29. The United Nations Decade for Women had had the three themes of equality, development and peace. It was not possible to secure a strategy for development and peace, while occupation continued in the Middle East, South Africa and other parts of the world. Certain representatives had stated that political disputes should be avoided in discussing the advancement of women. Women, in both developing and industrialized countries, were an integral part of society, and

(Mr. Abou-Hadid, Syrian  
Arab Republic)

women's issues could not be discussed in isolation from the political, economic and social situation of other segments of the population. That women should join in the struggle of their peoples was the most assured way of their attaining political, economic and social freedom.

30. In his country, the political leadership had shown great concern for the liberation of women and their full integration into society. Real changes had taken place in the situation of women and they had entered all areas of life, from that of political decision-making, through their representation in the leadership of political parties, to that of productive work in the fields and factories.

31. The plans adopted for the advancement of women sought to achieve a number of objectives: to reduce the difficulties encountered in the full integration of women in political, economic, social and cultural life; to implement fully the policy of elementary education for both boys and girls; to expand the opportunities available to women for advanced scientific and technological study; to strive for the complete eradication of illiteracy among women by 1990; to provide organized on-the-job training for women; to involve women in decision-making and project planning and implementation; to regulate the work of women in agriculture and provide them with training opportunities; to increase the availability of day-care centres and kindergartens at nominal fees; to provide the services necessary to help women combine family responsibilities with work; to amend the personal status law so as to promote the family; and to scrutinize all legislation with a view to ensuring equal treatment for men and women in all fields.

32. The qualitative leap made in integrating women into the planning and development process could not, unfortunately, be extended to the occupied part of the Golan. There, Syrian Arab women suffered under the Israeli occupation and were deprived of their most elementary rights by the means indicated in the annual report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories.

33. His delegation had been greatly encouraged by the activities to be undertaken by the United Nations and the specialized agencies and other organizations affiliated with the United Nations system in connection with the general implementation of the Strategies and their monitoring, as set forth in document A/41/623. His country had great hopes for the central role played by the Commission on the Status of Women in questions relating to the advancement of women and in the optimum utilization of the Strategies.

34. Ms. BENITEZ (Philippines) said that her country considered the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women to be one of the principal achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women. Her delegation called upon all States which had not yet done so to accede to the Convention.

35. Her delegation had noted from the report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (A/41/45), that the Committee was considerably behind in its consideration of the States parties' reports. It would support any measure which might overcome the problem. It also concurred with the

(Ms. Benitez, Philippines)

general observations arising from the fifth session of CEDAW (pp. 46 and 47 of the report). The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000 showed that many activities for the advancement of women were being successfully pursued throughout the United Nations system.

36. The activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women might benefit from a participation of technical and vocational institutions and universities, particularly in projects on food technology and credit systems.

37. Her delegation reaffirmed its unequivocal support for the Commission on the Status of Women. The proposed session of the Commission in January 1987, and annual meetings thereafter, would help the Commission to monitor the implementation of the Strategies more efficiently.

38. The new draft Constitution of the Philippines recognized the role of women in nation-building and ensured the fundamental equality before the law of women and men. At the subregional level, the ministerial meeting of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in June 1986 had reaffirmed its support for the Strategies. ASEAN was currently considering a regional programme of action for the advancement of women.

39. Women from all walks of life had participated in the bloodless revolution which had taken place in the Philippines in February 1986. Their adherence to non-violent activism and their commitment to peace had ensured a peaceful transition of power. The ascendancy of a woman to the presidency had opened up a new chapter in the history of her country.

40. Mr. LY (Senegal) said that it was essential to ensure the effective implementation and follow-up of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. At a national level, women should be helped to participate in and benefit from the development process. In Senegal, one of the main obstacles to women's advancement, particularly in rural areas, was their heavy burden of domestic duties. The Government was trying to set up amenities such as food mills and wells to give rural women more chance to participate in real development activities. The main objective was to integrate Senegalese women into economic and social development and political life. The literacy campaign, training and information were important aspects of that process.

41. The Strategies called for evaluation and follow-up, based on the national monitoring activities, including those of non-governmental organizations. In that connection, his delegation welcomed the proposed session of the Commission on the Status of Women in January 1987, which would draw up a programme of work reflecting the real needs of women. In the definition of priorities, the United Nations Programme of Action for Africa's Economic Recovery and Development, 1986-1990 should be borne in mind. The Strategies also emphasized the attention due to particularly vulnerable groups of women and those subjected to foreign occupation and apartheid. International monitoring activities should involve the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Training and Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).



42. Mr. CERMAK (Austria) said that it was vital to sustain the momentum generated during the United Nations Decade for Women. Many of the problems facing women had yet to be solved, and patience and perseverance would be necessary.

43. Although legislation had been introduced in many countries to improve the status of women, a change in the basic attitudes between men and women was essential for any lasting progress. No modern society could afford to dispense with the skills and perception which women were able to provide. Men should look upon the call for equality for women not as a threat, but as the chance to take advantage of a new creativity which would benefit both women and men.

44. His delegation welcomed the proposal to hold a session of the Commission on the Status of Women in January 1987. It would be necessary to take the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies into consideration in preparing for the last two years of the current medium-term plan, which ended in 1989 and in making proposals for the 1990-1995 plan.

45. His delegation wondered whether the Women's Branch of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs had been given a fair chance to operate successfully. The Centre should be given more scope to design programmes and also to implement them within a given framework. The institutional framework of the Commission on the Status of Women also required some attention. The increase in the Commission's workload would require either annual sessions or the extension of the biennial sessions. His delegation would also like to see a more equitable balance between female and male staff members in the managerial and professional grades of the United Nations system.

46. His delegation was pleased to note the growing number of States which had acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. However, if all States parties fulfilled their reporting obligations, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) would have to consider more than 20 reports at every session. It was obvious that alternative arrangements would have to be made.

47. His delegation considered that some reservations might be incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention. However, it was essential that as many countries as possible should participate in CEDAW's deliberations, and a purely legalistic view might not always be the right approach to a social issue such as the status of women.

48. Mrs. CHIMELA (Botswana) commended the work done in the Economic Commission for Africa for the advancement of women regionally. Internationally, the United Nations Development Fund for Women should develop and implement innovative programmes to help women through the generation of income and employment, the transfer of rural technology and the provision of credit and basic services. The Commission on the Status of Women should meet in 1987 and provide clear guidelines to monitor the planning and implementation of the Strategies.

(Mrs. Chimela, Botswana)

49. In her own country, high priority was assigned to expanding the involvement of women in the decision-making and development processes through a development plan that stressed rural employment opportunities, decentralization of decision-making and greater participation of the rural population in national development efforts. As a result, women had become the backbone of the country's health care delivery system and were among its principal beneficiaries, and special efforts were being made to develop and extend women's participation in agricultural production.

50. Her Government, through the appropriate bodies, disseminated information on issues relating to women through the mass media, and it also organized seminars, conferences and research activities relating to the role and status of women in the country.

51. Miss BRENNEN (Bahamas) said that her country, conscious of the importance of national efforts to implement the Strategies, was strengthening existing programmes designed to advance the status of women and planning new ones, with stress on training, advisory services and technical assistance. In public life, women held a number of decision-making positions and in the private sector they were making great progress in areas such as finance, real estate, insurance, law and medicine. In the social sphere, legislation to protect the interests of women had been enacted in areas relating to marriage, divorce and child support. Non-governmental organizations had been instrumental in aiding those efforts as well as in sensitizing the public to women's needs and problems.

52. Her delegation welcomed the programmes to help women described in document A/41/672, and particularly the research and training initiatives planned by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. It also welcomed the information provided in document A/41/623 and took particular note of the proposed procedure for future monitoring described in part II, section C because of the need to strengthen existing machinery and to establish precise guidelines to co-ordinate the implementation of the Strategies. The Commission on the Status of Women in particular had a central role to play in implementing the Strategies and her delegation looked forward to a constructive exchange of views during that body's special session in January 1987, which should produce practical, specific and comprehensive recommendations.

53. Mr. CABRAL (Guinea-Bissau) said that despite considerable progress, much remained to be done to improve the status of women in the world. Never before had the international community been better equipped to perform its responsibilities in that connection. The implementation of the Strategies should be integrated into the regular programme of work of the United Nations by incorporating them permanently into the mandate of the specialized agencies so as to end the diversity of approach in the system described in paragraph 5 of document A/41/623. The absence of statistical data was often an obstacle to improving the status of women and his delegation therefore welcomed the forthcoming publication of a new collection of statistics by the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs as well as plans to have the Commission on the Status of Women collect statistics at the sectoral level with the aid of regional organizations and specialized agencies. Research, especially with the help of national research institutions, was also essential in implementing the goals of the Strategy.

(Mr. Cabral, Guinea-Bissau)

54. Ultimately, however, the member States themselves must take action to implement the Strategies, and in his country governmental institutions were working for the emancipation of women through improvements in basic health, family planning, support for rural women and education, and by extending the participation of women in the country's social, cultural, political and economic life. Those efforts were being impeded, however, by under-development and the world economic crisis, and international assistance, especially through the Commission on the Status of Women, was needed. His country also welcomed in that connection the efforts of the United Nations Development Fund for Women in such areas as food self-sufficiency, the participation of women in production, credit, technical assistance and training.

55. Mrs. ONGEWE (Kenya) said that her delegation was pleased to note that the momentum gathered at Nairobi had not been lost and that several Governments, including her own, had started the implementation of the Strategies within their own national priorities. However, the advancement of women could not come about in isolation but in the overall economic, political and socio-cultural development of a nation.

56. In Africa, the woman farmer was the backbone of the continent in the area of food production. Rural women therefore needed sanitary conditions and clean accessible water to protect their health and those of their families. Although much had been written about those women, their condition had not changed very much. Words without deeds would neither solve their problems nor comfort them.

57. Her delegation saw great merit in the planned January 1987 meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women. That meeting would recommend measures for systematic and system-wide implementation of the Strategies and ways and means of integrating them into the United Nations programme, planning and budgeting cycles. It was important that that goal be achieved so that women's issues and concerns were truly integrated in overall development by the year 2000.

58. Her delegation noted with appreciation that the United Nations Development Fund for Women had increased its activities in Africa and had paid particular attention to the small African woman farmer. She also noted that the expanded mandate of the Fund would require extensive and constant field support, supervision, monitoring and evaluation. She hoped that co-operation between the Fund, UNDP and all other organs and agencies of the United Nations would continue.

59. Miss SEDDOH (Togo) said that despite the successes gained, the objectives of the Decade had not been achieved. A decisive stage had now been reached during which concrete measures must be taken to translate the Strategies into action. It was therefore extremely important to accelerate the thrust of Nairobi towards more concrete achievements and to begin the immediate implementation of the Strategies.

60. Her delegation wished to express its full satisfaction with the efforts made in the developing countries by the United Nations Development Fund for Women. The Fund had just provided Togo with valuable assistance in the financing of a project on behalf of rural women. It should also be pointed out that the activities of the Fund truly took into account the priority needs of the countries which received its

(Miss Seddoh, Togo)

assistance. The international community should therefore make further efforts to increase the financial resources of the Fund in order to permit it to continue its useful task for the advancement of women.

61. The time was most propitious to begin the implementation of the Strategies and, in that connection, the Third Committee at the current session must define its priorities for the implementation and ensure that its discussions were not too complicated or sterile, lest it lose sight of the main objective. Accordingly, special attention should be paid to the preparation of a programme of work for the Commission on the Status of Women at its next session. The agenda must be carefully studied and should include only those items which were designed to achieve progress in the advancement of women. In addition, her delegation believed that the Commission should hold annual sessions.

62. While considerable progress had been made over the past 40 years, much remained to be done and it should be remembered that a world in which women were not able to play their full role and exercise their rights fully would be an unbalanced world.

63. Ms. NIEMANN (Canada) said that Canada's early ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was an integral part of the Canadian policy of equality for all. To encourage ratification by more States, Canada strongly recommended that guidelines on the scope and nature of the substantive articles of the Convention be prepared. That would enable States to ratify the Convention with fewer substantive reservations, thus strengthening its impact.

64. Her delegation believed that 1986 had been a year of solid achievement towards improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations system for the implementation of the Nairobi Strategies. Her delegation also regarded the January 1987 session of the Commission on the Status of Women as being critical to the successful implementation of the Strategies. She viewed that session primarily as a technical one convened for the specific purpose of ensuring that the administrative and management process of the United Nations took proper account of the measures recommended in the Strategies. The Commission, as the central policy-making body in that field, should ensure that the priorities established at Nairobi were properly integrated into the United Nations medium-term plan and in the biennial programme budgets deriving from that plan. The complexity and interrelationships of the agenda items had led the Commission to recommend a session of eight days. Her delegation believed that that session could be accommodated in the period 5 to 16 January, recommended by the Secretary-General, at minimal additional cost. The Commission's efforts in 1987 to improve its effectiveness and efficiency could provide all with a model for the period of reform which lay ahead.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.