



UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



Distr.
GENERAL

A/10111
11 June 1975
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

Thirtieth session
Items 77 and 78 of the preliminary list*

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR, INCLUDING THE PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR

STATUS AND ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE NEED
FOR ACHIEVING EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN AND TO WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE
ATTAINMENT OF THE GOALS OF THE SECOND UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT DECADE,
TO THE STRUGGLE AGAINST COLONIALISM, RACISM AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION
AND TO THE STRENGTHENING OF INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND OF CO-OPERATION
BETWEEN STATES

Note verbale dated 9 June 1975 from the Permanent Mission of the Ivory Coast
to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Ivory Coast to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to transmit herewith the message of the Head of State of the Ivory Coast on the occasion of National Women's Week, celebrated in the Ivory Coast from 17 to 23 May in observance of International Women's Year.

The Permanent Mission requests that this message be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under items 77 and 78 of the preliminary list of items to be included in the provisional agenda of the thirtieth session, and brought to the attention of the World Conference of the International Women's Year.

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ANNEX

Message of the Head of State of the Republic of the Ivory Coast,
His Excellency President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, on the occasion
of National Women's Week, celebrated in the Ivory Coast from
17 to 23 May 1975 on the occasion of International Women's Year

The United Nations has proclaimed the year 1975 International Women's Year and has established equality, development and peace as its theme.

It need hardly be emphasized how much this undertaking satisfies our wishes and goes straight to the hearts of all the inhabitants of this country, for whom these concepts, in addition to being the *raison d'être* of their efforts, symbolize exactly the indispensable conditions for the happiness of every human being and the progress of society.

Who, more than African women, could feel themselves directly concerned by this appeal, which responds to the impulses of their deepest nature and to the history of our continent, which for too long was an unfortunate sacrificial victim?

Loving and attentive wives, generous mothers, thrifty and prudent housewives, our female companions, particularly in the Ivory Coast, have been determined to be present in equal numbers in the vanguard of our struggles for freedom, and have demonstrated their full political maturity and their desire to participate actively in the nation's future. I am duty-bound, on behalf of all of us, men and women, citizens of this proud and independent country, to pay a deserved tribute here to our first women militants and to all those women who have followed them along this path of sacrifice and honour and who now, in ever-increasing numbers, hold responsible positions in our representative assemblies, the administration, the educational system and the business world.

Nevertheless, despite these very comforting examples, it is unfortunately obvious that, so far as the status of women is concerned, reality has not always kept pace with declarations of intent, nor at times even with the institutional reforms introduced by our legislators or by the Government.

This no doubt can be attributed to the weight of the past and of traditions as well as to inertia, but also - and this is even more regrettable - to a still excessively prevalent ignorance of the respective rights and duties of men and women, and to an obscure fear of change.

It was therefore fortunate and wise that the primary objective of International Women's Year was declared to be the concept of equality, which is the ideal of every human being and is essential to everyone's development.

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Equality before the law must of course come first, and our Constitution and the most important laws of the State proclaim that there shall be absolutely no discrimination between men and women citizens as regards civil, civic, economic and cultural rights and remuneration for work.

Equality is important and so is respect, but, it is difficult to reconcile this requirement with the notion that might makes right, which, through the intricate web of institutions and customs, unfortunately still governs many relationships in human society. There is no question that any man worthy of the name, and particularly any African man, honours his mother and is as affectionate towards his wife and daughters as he is towards his sons. However, there are always times in a family's life and in the relations between the family and other members of society when it is necessary to take decisions, some of them easy, some of them cruel, but all necessary, and often final. And, in such circumstances, the man's opinion counts for more in the balance, more than the weight of his intrinsic wisdom, and prevails over that of the woman, who is, however, in many respects more intelligent and intuitive, because her own person, her children or the safety of her home are at stake. An evolution in customs therefore appears desirable, although in this area, many of our African brothers have always had the wise habit of taking our women's views into account.

The legal affirmation of the principle of non-discrimination between the sexes and the recognition of the personality of women and of their own rights within society are now almost universally acknowledged to be prerequisites if women are to enjoy equality of opportunity, and thus, to occupy their rightful place in the human community.

However, in the field of concrete realities, the only truly meaningful area, these prerequisites do not seem sufficient in themselves and much remains to be done to attain the objectives laid down in the context of the global effort undertaken by the United Nations and of the more modest effort of States. It is therefore essential to recognize the place actually occupied by women and the place which they should enjoy in the family, the community, professional life, political and economic activities and the cultural life of the nation. In most of these areas, the institutions necessary for progress already exist: the civil code, compulsory education for all children, both boys and girls, vocational training and higher education, administrative examinations open to young people of both sexes, and the full legal capacity of married women which makes them the equals of men as far as their professional lives are concerned. The way has thus been paved for women of the Ivory Coast to participate more fully in political life, in the vital development of the country and in the progress of our society.

In all these areas, I believe that we should avoid a rigid approach and take into account the characteristics of our African world, which is marked by moderation and realism, leans naturally towards dialogue and agreement and is hostile to confrontation and any form of sectarianism. Although it is unfortunately true that for many years in national and international forums the rights of women were discussed and established almost exclusively by men, I feel

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that the attitude of certain women's liberation movements in countries other than ours, which have made it a rule to slam the door on any possible role for men and have systematically opted for hostility rather than negotiation, is equally unfortunate, as well as being ineffective. Most happily, such is not the case in Africa, and this very congenial and lively gathering is comforting proof of this.

For all these reasons it is therefore reasonable to believe, given the nature of things and the lessons of nature alone, that in the field of development and in the other aspects of life, men and women were made to understand one another, to complement one another and to help one another, with a view to the greater good of the community. No doubt some duties and occupations are more suited to men or to women, although recent developments - not to mention history or anecdotes - have shown us how much this notion is contingent and susceptible to swift and radical revision. Not so long ago, men claimed to know everything and to know how to do everything. Is it not natural that women should reason along the same lines?

Contemporary women have shown by concrete actions that they can assume the same responsibilities as men.

In the public sector, the most distinguished officials of our time include women who are ministers, prime ministers, and presidents of republics. They do honour to the fair sex and to all mankind.

All options have finally been opened to women.

In the Ivory Coast - and this is a formal assurance on behalf of our Party and the Government - the doors to all responsibilities shall henceforth be open without any restriction whatsoever to our women, who possess the admirable qualities of courage, intelligence and devotion.

Lastly, I should like to refer to an area which is dear to me, in which women can play a decisive role. I am speaking of peace, which has been the dream of mothers and wives throughout the world, no doubt since the dawn of time. It is you, my dear sisters, who have the responsibility of instilling in our children, when they are very young, love of one's fellow man, respect for others without distinction as to race, religion or fortune, the value of well-done and liberating work, courage in the face of challenge, the virtues of dialogue and non-violence, the outstanding qualities of tolerance and peace, in short, every quality that constitutes the dignity of the human person.

I am certain that this year of reflection and the activities which will be carried out under the enlightened direction of the Association of Women of the Ivory Coast - whose great merits and total devotion to the fundamental interests of our country I wish to emphasize here - will make it possible to make further great strides along the path towards equality in development, along the road to peace, and, thus, towards a better future for the men and women of the Ivory Coast.

Fully confident in these intentions and inspired by these hopes, and on behalf of all the citizens of this country, men and women alike, I solemnly proclaim the beginning of National Women's Week in the Ivory Coast.