

GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY

## SEVENTH SESSION

Official Records



THIRD COMMITTEE, 477th

MEETING

Monday, 15 December 1952, at 10.30 a.m.

Headquarters, New York

## C O N T E N T S

	Page
Draft convention on political rights of women (A/2156, A/2156/Add.1, A/2172, chapter V, section XII, paragraphs 620-624, A/C.3/L.330) (continued) .....	357
Appointment of an acting chairman .....	365

Chairman: Mr. S. Amjad ALI (Pakistan).

**Draft convention on political rights of women**  
**(A/2156, A/2156/Add.1, A/2172, chapter V,**  
**section XII, paragraphs 620-624, A/C.3/L.330)**  
*(continued)*

[Item 61]\*

1. The CHAIRMAN noted that the Committee had before it a draft resolution (A/C.3/L.330) incorporating the text of the draft convention transmitted by the Economic and Social Council and that a vote would be taken on that draft resolution and not on the text transmitted by the Council and contained in documents A/2156.

2. He therefore requested representatives who had submitted amendments to the text of the draft convention to alter the form of those amendments so that they should apply to the draft resolution in question.

3. He also suggested, in order to afford delegations adequate time for the submission of amendments to the draft resolution (A/C.3/L.330), that the time limit for the submission of amendments should be extended to Monday, 15 December at 3 p.m.

*It was so decided.*

4. Mr. TRHLIK (Czechoslovakia) commented that the authors of the United Nations Charter, mindful of the fact that many countries had not yet recognized the principle of the equality of men and women in the political and economic fields or, if they had recognized it, had failed to provide guarantees for effective application of that principle, had inserted a number of provisions in the Charter designed to remedy that situation and finally to ensure the complete equality of all human beings without discrimination based on sex or any other consideration. Nevertheless, despite those provisions, the status of women in many countries

was still far from satisfactory, as had been shown by the discussion on the draft convention before the Committee.

5. Many speakers had drawn attention to the fact that millions of women in capitalist countries and in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories were deprived of all political, economic and social rights. The delegations of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Ukrainian SSR and the Byelorussian SSR had cited many facts which revealed the deplorable position of those women who were deliberately kept in ignorance, denied access to public office, paid wages much lower than those received by men for equal work and who, in some States, did not even enjoy the right to vote.

6. United Nations organs which had dealt with the question of the status of women, namely, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on the Status of Women, had adopted a number of resolutions in the matter but had not so far prepared any recommendations to effect the elimination of the inequality suffered by women. The draft convention on the political rights of women, which represented the final product of their labours, could not in its existing form be considered as fulfilling the aspirations of women deprived of their rights who wished to enjoy equality with men and improved living conditions. In fact, that draft convention contained a number of omissions which made it almost completely ineffective.

7. In the first place, the draft convention imposed no obligation on signatory States and was therefore a mere declaration. It did not recommend the adoption of legislative or other measures to guarantee women full exercise of political rights identical with the rights of men. Such a text could not help to improve the condition of women in the world.

8. Secondly, the draft did not contain any provision against discrimination. That omission violated the

\* Indicates the item number on the agenda of the General Assembly.

basic principle of the convention inasmuch as the text could easily be interpreted as merely recognizing the equality of men and women belonging to identical groups, namely men and women of the same race, colour, ethnic origin, property status, etc., without affirming the principle of the equality of all human beings without any distinction whatever.

9. The need to abolish discrimination was stressed in many provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, which were welcomed by all progressive peoples, who hoped that the United Nations would take the steps necessary to ensure implementation. Discriminatory practices went hand in hand with the capitalist system and persisted not only in colonies and dependent territories, but even in the capitalist countries themselves. Discrimination was a way of achieving a policy of exploitation. Its aim was to incite hatred among peoples, to make bigger profits out of the labour of others and, in the case of imperialist countries, to maintain their strength. That was why capitalist States had so far taken no action to abolish discrimination, which they regarded as an essential element of their policy. Any attempt to eliminate discrimination was looked upon as dangerous. It thus became clear that the provisions of the Charter calling for abolition of discriminatory practices were acceptable to those countries as long as the principle of non-discrimination was recognized in theory only, but that they were viewed with suspicion once the stage of implementation was reached. Mr. D. F. Malan, the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Union of South Africa, had openly stated, according to the newspaper *Cape Times* of 23 September 1952, that the United Nations represented a danger because the Charter provided that there should be no discrimination on grounds of race and colour.

10. The United States of America provided an example of a country where discrimination in all its forms was practised. Not only were women in that country in an inferior position to men in the political, economic and cultural fields but also Negro women suffered discrimination as compared with white women. Thus, according to the *Labor Fact Book*, the average salary of women had risen to slightly over one thousand dollars in 1948 while the average salary of men was 2.3 times higher in the same year; in addition the average salary of Negro women was less than 50 per cent of the average salary of women as a whole. In the matter of political rights, that double discrimination affected non-white women even more sharply. In the United States of America, Negroes were deprived of practically all political rights, as was clear from the data published in the *National Guardian* of 9 August 1950 to the effect that only an average of 1.2 per cent of the Negro population had been able to vote in 1947—0.9 per cent in Mississippi, 2.6 per cent in Louisiana, 13 per cent in South Carolina, 13.2 per cent in Virginia and 15.2 per cent in North Carolina. Moreover, the Census Bureau indicated that between 1940 and 1948, in the State of Georgia, one-third of the population of which was Negro, only 18 per cent of Negroes over 21 years of age were registered in the electoral lists as compared with 82 per cent registration of Whites; in 1940, that percentage had been even lower because of the Poll-Tax Law. Those figures clearly showed

that a great majority of the Negroes, particularly Negro women, were deliberately denied the exercise of their right to vote by various measures designed to prevent them from registering in the electoral lists. That régime of terror imposed on Negroes to prevent them from taking part in the various aspects of public life was a shameful form of exploitation and economic discrimination.

11. The United Kingdom also practised discrimination against women and particularly against Negro women. The *Manchester Guardian* of 27 March 1952 stated that for the month of October 1951 the average weekly salary of men was 166 shillings while the corresponding salary for women was 90 shillings. According to the *Times* of 20 November 1952, the National Union of Women Teachers had expressed grave concern at the statement of Mr. R. A. Butler, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that the Government could not in the near future consider the application, even on a progressive basis, of the principle of equal salary for equal work for British civil servants. As for the 40,000 non-white workers, a publication of the Bow Group which had appeared in July 1952, showed that at least one-third were illiterate and, with a few exceptions, the others had only primary education.

12. It was therefore obvious that the convention on the political rights of women could achieve its goal, namely improvement in the condition of all women who were still oppressed and the full exercise of their political rights, only if it contained a clause not only guaranteeing women equality with men but also guaranteeing the equality of all women without discrimination on grounds of race, colour, property status, language or religion. A convention recognizing to women equal rights with men would be of little value in countries where men themselves did not enjoy equal rights because of their race, religion or property status. To take specific examples, he asked what would be the point of a convention guaranteeing Negro women in the United States the same rights as Negro men when the latter suffered constant and systematic discrimination accompanied by acts of violence and genocide; or what would be the value of such a convention to American Indian women when, according to the *New York Times* of 14 April 1952, the United States Senate was considering the adoption of a law imposing new restrictions on the rights of Indians?

13. Finally, as it stood, the text of the draft convention did not contain any clauses providing for its application to Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories. Yet the condition of women in those territories bordered on slavery. The colonial Powers kept the indigenous populations in ignorance and reduced them to misery. Despite their natural wealth, the colonies of Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania were familiar with famine, as the Third Committee had fully realized when it had discussed the right of self-determination of peoples and the Preliminary Report on the World Social Situation. That report stated that for the indigenous inhabitants the per capita expenditures for education were 115 times lower than the corresponding expenditures for Europeans in Kenya and 150 times lower in the Belgian Congo and that in addition the number of girls enrolled in the primary schools had decreased from 5 per cent in 1937 to 4 per

cent in recent years in the Belgian Congo, that figure also including the daughters of white settlers. There again it was clear that an article should be inserted in the convention making it applicable to Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories.

14. The USSR amendments (A/C.3/L.327 and A/C.3/L.328) remedied the omissions which he had just pointed out and the adoption of those amendments would make the draft convention an instrument really capable of achieving equality between men and women throughout the world.

15. The Czechoslovak delegation was proud to represent a nation which long previously had resolved the problem of equal rights for men and women. The Constitution of that country, promulgated in 1948, provided for absolute equality of men and women and, in Czechoslovakia as in the other peoples' democracies, women actively participated in all aspects of public life. Moreover, Czechoslovakia had not been content merely to recognize that principle; it had also established the conditions necessary for its implementation. Thus one of the first acts of the Czechoslovak Government, after the liberation of the country in 1945, had been to recognize the right of all citizens to work and the principle of equal compensation for equal work for men and women. The Constitution also guaranteed women access to education, to all professions and to all administrative and honorary posts on an equal footing with men and included special provisions for the protection of mothers and children, the family being recognized as the corner-stone of the nation's development.

16. That explained the increase in the number of Czechoslovak women in employment. At the end of 1951 one-third of all workers were women; in that year women represented 48 per cent of the workers in light industries, 38 per cent of those in the food industries, 53 per cent of those in the distributive trades and in agriculture. A woman holding an executive post was no longer the exception in Czechoslovakia; there were 18 women factory directors who had previously been employed in the textile industry. In addition to 110,000 women teachers in elementary and secondary schools and more than 40,000 women employed in the public health services, there was an increasing number of women doctors, university professors and heads of scientific institutions; the post of Dean of the University of Olomouc was held by a woman. In 1951, 31,000 women, or five times as many as in previous years, were members of national commissions, many of them acting as chairmen; 37 women were members of the National Assembly and one was a member of the Government. The Chairman of the Czechoslovak delegation to the seventh session of the General Assembly was a woman. In October 1949, 7.5 per cent of the judges of the People's Courts had been women, a figure which had arisen to 24 per cent between 1951 and 1952.

17. In order to permit women to make full use of their rights, the Czechoslovak Government had not hesitated to purchase costly equipment and to initiate extensive technical improvement programmes with a view to minimizing the physical effort entailed by certain types of employment so that they could be undertaken by women. It had made it possible for

women to obtain the same technical education and training as men. The number of girls studying in highly specialized schools had doubled between 1948 and 1951; the number of girls in agricultural schools was currently 59 per cent as against 48 per cent in 1948, while the number of girls in secondary schools had risen from 36 per cent to 43 per cent in the course of the last school year. Lastly, the Government had taken a series of measures to protect and assist women during maternity, including the establishment of pre-natal clinics (the number of which was 556 per cent higher than in 1938), free medical attention, insurance covering the cost of confinement, eighteen weeks' maternity leave, a bonus of 2,500 crowns on the birth of a child and the gift of a complete layette. The Czechoslovak Government also assisted mothers in rearing their children. The number of crèches had risen 82 per cent since 1948 and the number of kindergartens and centres for children of school age had doubled within a few years. The progress achieved in maternal and child welfare could be gauged from the fact that the number of live births had increased by 40 per cent since 1937.

18. If the report of the United Kingdom Ministry of Health was approached with those facts and figures in mind, it was clear that, unlike the Czechoslovak Government, the United Kingdom Government was taking no steps to guarantee to women enjoyment of their political rights, but taking measures which had precisely the opposite effect. The United Kingdom was not proposing to increase the number of maternal and child welfare centres; on the contrary the authorities considered that the cost of maintaining day nurseries was only justified in the case of children in need of special attention, for medical or social reasons. Crèches and kindergartens were not for women who wished to leave their children there during the day for the sole purpose of increasing the family income as a result of their work.

19. The Czechoslovak delegation, deeply sympathetic towards women deprived of their rights both in capitalist countries and in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, desired the adoption of a convention ensuring complete equality of rights between men and women throughout the whole world. It could not accept the incomplete text proposed by the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, whose efforts had been undermined by the systematic rejection by the imperialist powers of the USSR amendments, which were designed to fill the obvious gaps in the draft convention.

20. It would therefore vote for those amendments, which were in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and which would ensure that the convention was an instrument capable of guaranteeing enjoyment of their political rights to the women of the world.

21. Mrs. HARMAN (Israel) pointed out that women of outstanding intelligence and character had always exerted an influence as mothers, wives or friends, but their gifts found only limited expression in a circumvented environment. As the Philippine representative had pointed out, women had been great before their greatness had been recognized by legislation. The

emancipation of women had begun only in the nineteenth century and, while the position of women had much improved since then, it was still not entirely satisfactory. In some parts of the world women were completely subordinate to men and in others, only a few privileged women had obtained recognition of their rights. Even in the most advanced countries, women had not yet obtained complete equality. As the United States representative had pointed out, too few women still held posts of authority, since prejudices were long-lived and could be overcome only by time and by the ability which women would display.

22. Absolute equality of rights and duties between men and women had been one of the fundamental principles of government laid down at the time of the establishment of the State of Israel. That principle had found expression in the law on the equal rights for men and women, which had been passed in 1951 and which had abolished all the legal disabilities of women, including the majority of those still existing under religious law. Women were entitled to vote at the age of 18. In the general elections Bedouin women had voted for the first time side by side with women who had been exercising that privilege for many years. The 120 members of the Knesset included 11 women, one of whom was the Minister of Labour. Women were members of the councils and executive committees of all the large political parties. Some held senior posts in the diplomatic service, the civil service, law, and medicine and some held important administrative and executive positions. They had exercised a far-reaching influence on the life of the country. As far back as 1911 a conference of women workers of the Jordan Valley had proclaimed their resolve to play an active and creative part in all stages of the country's development. They had fought not only for political equality but also for the right to work on an equal footing with men in draining marshes, in building roads and in reclaiming waste land. In 1925 the Council of Women Workers had become an important part of the General Federation of Jewish Labour. Women had access to all trades and professions and received equal pay for equal work; they were however legally barred from trades which might be physically harmful to women. The law guaranteed paid maternity leave, re-instatement in employment after confinement and prohibited night work for mothers.

23. The women of Israel had done much to facilitate the assimilation and integration of tens of thousands of refugees. Women's organizations had impressed upon new arrivals the need for personal effort and had given them a true conception of the rights and duties inherent in a democracy, which were the basis of political maturity.

24. One of the first laws passed by Parliament had been one instituting compulsory education. The exercise of the right of citizenship presupposed the ability to read and write in order to understand the political questions which profoundly affected the individual's daily life. It was unfortunate that illiteracy should still be more common among women than among men. The women of all countries should redouble their efforts to secure basic educational reforms as well as political rights. The example of the women both in the West and in Asia who had rendered distinguished

service to their countries and who had assumed political, social and civic responsibility should be an encouragement to those still fighting to secure equal rights with men, those whom the Committee's debates could not but inspire with greater confidence in themselves.

25. The draft convention on political rights of women was fully in conformity with legislation already in force in the State of Israel, and she could support the draft contained in document A/C.3/L.330. She was in favour of its simple and concise form and would oppose any amendments likely to complicate the text without adding to its implicit contents.

26. She considered that the USSR amendments (A/C.3/L.327) were repetitive and would abstain from voting on them.

27. She agreed with the interpretation the United States and other representatives had placed on article 3 of the draft convention, which should not be applied to military service. She understood it to be the right of a citizen, whether man or woman, to be elected or appointed to public office under the same requirements, with equality of opportunity. That did not apply to military service, which involved a duty rather than a right, at least where conscription was concerned; there were besides physical and other obstacles, which had not yet been overcome.

28. She accepted the proposal made by the United States representative at the 474th meeting to add the words "related thereto" after the words "public functions", which would remove all possible misunderstanding.

29. She would support the Norwegian representative's amendment but would vote against the USSR amendment (A/C.3/L.328, point 2), since her country had accepted the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (Article 36 of the Statute of the Court). She had no objection to the introduction of the colonial clause after article 7 of the text annexed to the joint draft resolution (A/C.3/L.330).

30. She reserved the right to ask for the floor again in order to comment on any amendments which might be submitted.

31. Mr. FRONTAURA ARGANDOÑA (Bolivia) wished to state the reasons which had led him, together with other delegations, to submit the draft resolution and the draft convention included in document A/C.3/L.330.

32. Six years had passed since the General Assembly had unanimously declared the equality of men and women and United Nations organs had been studying the question of political rights of women ever since. The delay was not due to a lack of interest but to differences of opinion as to the details of the draft. That divergence of view was prejudicial to a noble and just cause and it seemed as though the adoption of a convention on political rights of women might be harmful to basic positions taken on sovereignty or national policy. The Bolivian delegation thought that any proposal which was not realistic would merely delay the achievement of United Nations aims. It knew very well that it was impossible to achieve perfection, i.e., absolute equality, at the first attempt, but it considered that the way should be opened for reforms so

that the rights of women could become universal and complete. Perfection would follow. The Charter of the United Nations and subsidiary international agreements could be revised and improved, since the Organization, which was essentially a deliberative assembly, could not stand still. What was done today could be improved tomorrow. The main thing was that some action should be taken.

33. It was understood, however, that the Bolivian delegation would not oppose any amendment designed to achieve the widest possible application of the convention, and the recognition of everything which improved the status of women, whatever their race, language, religion or degree of culture. It would study, with the interest which it always evinced when the question of widening the scope of law and of combating oppression was raised, any proposal made in the course of the debates within the limits laid down in the rules of procedure. It wished, however, as a tribute to the Bolivian women who had died in the fight for the political, economic and social progress of their country, to do everything in its power to have the draft convention approved at the current session, and would not accept any proposals which by their nature might delay that action.

34. It was for that reason that the Bolivian delegation warned the Committee against a too thorough search for perfection which, although understandable, would retard the progress already made along the road towards the equality of men and women in work for the cultural, scientific and political development of the world.

35. His country's attitude towards women was one of long standing. The political structure of the Bolivian nation went back as far as the tenth century, when Bolivia was known as Kollasuyo. The Inca empire, of which the territory of what had become Bolivia had been a part, had had two founders: Manko Kacap and his wife Mama Oclo. Inca culture had been one of the most advanced of all times and its economic, political and social organization had been much superior to that of the rest of the world at that time, until conquest had turned a happy nation into a slave nation, which had remained in that condition until very recently. He emphasized the word "nation" because Bolivia was not just an improvised State—it was the continuation of a national organization, with its own personality, which went back more than ten centuries.

36. Traditionally, Bolivian women had always shared with men the work and control of affairs in agricultural communities which although not individually owners of the land, were joint owners under a communal system where each worked for the good of all. Unfortunately the colonial system which had lasted until April 1952, without, however, completely achieving its objective, had reduced men to slavery and women to domesticity. The latter could, however, still judge for themselves and exercise their political rights. During the reign of terror which had lasted from 1946 to 1952, the plutocratic government had used all means to prevent opposition candidates from winning at municipal elections. In order to achieve its goal it had even mobilized the Church and had provided for the excommunication of the men and women voting for such candidates. The Bolivian women had realized the

injustice of that action, and although fundamentally Catholic, had assured the success of the opposition in spite of the serious risk which they ran of being deprived of religious aid.

37. Furthermore, Bolivian legislators had always thought that the recognition of the political rights of women should be preceded by a declaration of their civil rights. That was why the 1945 Constitution, the most progressive ever promulgated in Bolivia, provided for equal rights for men and women, although up to that time women had been subject to the legal guardianship of their husbands. The President who had dared to promulgate such a Constitution had aroused the anger of the big mine-owners, who were interested in keeping women enslaved in the mines and fields. When the Bolivian people had revolted against that system of oppression, more than a thousand women had perished, many at the side of their sons, in battles fought against an entire army. As a tribute to the innate magnanimity of women, their devotion to noble causes, and the bravery they had displayed in the fight for freedom, the Government had adopted, on 21 July 1952, a decree which granted the vote to all Bolivians, men and women, without distinction. It had thus merely sanctioned, in the political field, a development brought about by women's own efforts in other fields.

38. The women of Bolivia had had the right since 1906 to secondary, professional and university education. The education of women had developed thanks to the Belgian missions and to the North American colleges. Since then hundreds of women had followed the legal, medical and teaching professions and had taken part in political life. The efforts made by Bolivian women to free themselves from the oppression of an oligarchy which regarded them merely as slaves of its economic interests, should not fail for lack of international support which might give them a convention such as that before the Committee. It was for that reason that the Bolivian delegation had joined with other delegations in submitting a draft resolution.

39. He thought that the draft convention annexed to document A/C.3/L.330 had many practical advantages over the texts reproduced in document A/2156/Add.1. In the first place, it contained the principle of non-intervention, which was a part of public law on the American continent and which Bolivia wished to maintain and strengthen. Secondly, it did not introduce elements which by their nature could give rise to controversies far removed from the problem dealt with.

40. In that connexion, the Bolivian delegation emphasized that, although the colonial clause did not appear in the draft convention submitted to the Committee (A/C.3/L.330 annex), that did not mean that the draft prejudiced the status of colonial countries. His delegation would not, therefore, object to the inclusion of that clause in the text, but it was a question of political rights of women and one should be satisfied for the time being with what could be realized—the rest would follow.

41. The Bolivian delegation therefore thought that the draft was a middle way between the two extreme positions and was ready to support any proposals which might improve it and add anything positive to it.

42. Mrs. AFNAN (Iraq) warmly supported the draft convention on the rights of women although she represented a country which had not yet granted women the vote and belonged to the Moslem world where custom made recluses of women, which seemed to be the supreme example of discrimination. She wished to explain her action as it seemed to surprise some delegations.

43. The Iraqi delegation had always thought that the Charter of the United Nations, by placing equal value on the vote of each Member State, imposed on each of them very serious responsibilities. While all States were equally bound to defend the principles of the United Nations, they did not all have the same opportunities of carrying out that duty. A large number of countries had not the power which economic and military supremacy or the experience of an unbroken and uncontested sovereignty conferred. They gave the discussions the benefit of their culture and placed an unspoiled idealism in the services of the common cause. They felt doubly indebted to the principles which had granted them equality with the most powerful countries. The Iraqi delegation felt it must support those countries so that they might constitute a majority.

44. For that reason she supported the draft, although her Government might not adhere to the convention. That position was perfectly consistent with her responsibilities as a Moslem and as the representative of Iraq. The secluded state of the Moslem woman was not based on tradition or on the laws of Islam which, adopted approximately 1,300 years previously, were much more liberal than Roman and other laws. In many cases the Moslem woman had a right to divorce. The man was entitled to one-third only of the family property so that the woman could never be entirely dispossessed. The economic independence of women was recognized.

45. She was convinced that the problem of discrimination in respect to women was essentially the same throughout the world and that its origin was the instinctive desire to protect woman, who perpetuated the species. Even in the countries which were most advanced politically, much time had elapsed before woman's value in the political sphere had been recognized from the Magna Carta to 1918, from the French Revolution to 1944, from the Bill of Rights to 1920 and her value in the social and economic spheres had not yet been recognized in those countries.

46. She would not analyse the complex causes which had led to the confinement of the Moslem woman but she declared that the negligence and ignorance of which the Moslem woman had been a victim were due to Moslems and not to Islam. The early history of the Moslem countries was indeed filled with the names of stateswomen, queens and poetesses.

47. She did not believe the provisions of the convention contrary to Moslem law. The movement for the emancipation of women in Asia was linked with the national emancipation movements in that part of the world. In the Arab countries as in the rest of Asia, while the hope of achieving independence was growing, there was at the same time criticism of certain customs and institutions: national reconstruction should be the aim of the whole nation and the task was so great that it required the combined efforts of all, men and women.

There had not therefore been any feminist movement as such, nor any antagonism on the part of the men. Complete emancipation had been the joint aim of both sexes.

48. She recalled that the Iraqi Constitution, which dated from 1925, when Iraq was still a mandated territory, provided that one representative for every twenty thousand men should be elected to the Chamber of Deputies. There was still no feminist movement in Iraq, although the chief political parties had placed the vote for women on their programmes. A law promulgated in 1926 stated that, save for express provisions to the contrary, the clauses relating to men should apply equally to women. That law enabled women to practise medicine and law and to serve as judges or in the administration when they had obtained the necessary diplomas. The Iraqi woman thus had the right to be appointed to public office before they had the right to vote.

49. An effort was being made in the Arab countries to give new life to their cultural traditions and to borrow from the West elements which would raise the standard of living of the masses: woman's right to vote was one such element. She therefore hoped that the General Assembly would adopt the convention by as large a majority as possible, so that the greatest possible number of States might ratify it. That convention, which would affect half the world's population, gave legal expression to a principle of the United Nations Charter and must correspond to its lofty aims.

50. She supported the Danish representative who had emphasized (474th meeting) that women's economic, social, cultural and political rights were all of equal importance. The convention should therefore be considered, not as an end in itself, but as a means of suppressing other discriminatory measures and helping women to exercise their other rights. She emphasized that the convention could not replace the relevant articles of the draft covenants on human rights. She thought the equality of rights which women should enjoy in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres should be clearly and specifically stated in the articles of the covenants. She hoped the convention would encourage those who already possessed political right to make better use of them in the interests of their countries and of international understanding, and those who were still seeking equality to make greater efforts to obtain it.

51. Her delegation thanked the Commission on the Status of Women, which had had an arduous task, for the excellent text it had proposed for the three substantive clauses. She hoped that the Arabic translation of the words "public office" and "public functions" would take into account the discussions which had occurred on those expressions and the interesting statement made on the subject by the United States representative at the 474th meeting.

52. Her delegation would support the Netherlands representative's amendment (A/C.3/L.329/Rev.1), which improved the text.

53. It would also support the USSR amendments to articles 1, 2 and 3 (A/C.3/L.327). Some delegations thought those amendments were repetitious, others considered them out of place in a convention which dealt



only with equality between men and women. Her delegation believed them essential, for everyone knew from experience how, despite the best intentions, discrimination might occur.

54. The new article 4 proposed by the USSR (A/C.3/L.327, point 4) seemed unnecessary because the exercise of political rights was impossible without appropriate legislation. She would therefore abstain when it was put to the vote.

55. She would vote against the amendments proposed by the USSR to article 7-A (A/C.3/L.328, point 1), for she was fundamentally opposed to that type of reservation in an international agreement. She did not see the use of a universal convention drafted in broad terms if every State could make reservations to it.

56. Ato Haddis ALEMAYEHOU (Ethiopia) said the draft convention was acceptable to his delegation, as was any resolution or amendment based on the same principles.

57. It was just that women should have full participation in the political, economic, social and cultural life of their country, and that was the object of the current evolutionary movement in the world. Refusal to recognize it would be a refusal to understand and accept an indisputable historic event. Progress in that respect could not be stopped, but the rate of progress varied in different cases. It had already been possible in some countries to surmount the numerous obstacles which the movement encountered everywhere. In other countries, they still barred the way. For various reasons, the countries which were economically, politically and socially under-developed had been unable to give their cultural life the breadth and scope which it had in other nations. They were none the less exerting the utmost efforts to develop themselves. It was by their efforts and not by the results obtained that their goodwill should be judged.

58. It was true that it was only relatively recently that Ethiopia had had a parliamentary system based on those of the West. No restrictions, had, however, ever been imposed in that country on women's access to public functions. Ethiopia had on various occasions been governed by empresses. Several women had been provincial governors. Women had commanded Ethiopian armies on the battlefield, for example at Adowa, and during the Italian-Ethiopian war. The 1931 Constitution laid down that public functions were open to all without distinction as to sex or religion.

59. He wished to draw attention to table IV annexed to the Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2154). Ethiopia appeared there among the countries where women had no political rights and a footnote said that there were "no electoral rights for men and women" in that country. That statement was incorrect and was morally damaging to Ethiopia. Since 1942, elections had in fact taken place regularly and were held according to the special customs of each region. Voting was by secret ballot.

60. He asked the Secretariat to make the necessary corrections to document A/2154 and to delete a piece of information which was already incorrect when only the 1931 Constitution was involved, and was still more so now.

61. Miss KALINOWSKA (Poland) recalled that her delegation had stated its position on the draft convention both in the Commission on the Status of Women and in the Economic and Social Council.

62. A convention on the political rights of women could help to improve the position of women throughout the world only if it ensured them the effective exercise of those rights. In many countries women enjoyed complete political equality in theory, but lived under such conditions that they could not in fact participate in the political life of the nation. Any convention which did not compel signatory States to improve conditions of that kind was therefore devoid of any real value or significance. The draft drawn up by the Commission on the Status of Women and transmitted to the General Assembly by the Economic and Social Council did not contain the necessary guarantees. That state of affairs was the result of the attitude adopted by the majority of members of the Commission, who had concerned themselves solely with secondary problems or, when a really important point had been raised, had treated it superficially and engaged in procedural arguments.

63. As it stood, the draft convention was purely declaratory in nature. Events showed, however, that it was not enough to recognize the principle of woman's political equality to ensure that equality in practice. The USSR delegation had submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its sixth session amendments designed to make the convention really effective by obliging signatory States to do away with all existing forms of discrimination and by emphasizing that that obligation should apply to Non-Self-Governing Territories as well as to others. Her delegation had supported those amendments. It had, for its part, submitted two draft resolutions—on equal pay and on the right to professional training and to specialized technical employment—the adoption of which would have made it possible to improve the economic and social position of women, which actually determined their political position. The majority of the Commission had rejected the USSR amendments and the Polish draft resolutions. Arguments which had just been repeated in the Third Committee had been advanced against the amendment specifying grounds of discrimination. The need for clarity, simplicity and brevity had been urged. Her delegation would answer that the points in question were the most important of all, and without them the convention would lose all its meaning and all its effectiveness. It had been said that the USSR amendments were redundant, and the ideas they expressed were already implicit in the text. She recalled that the authors of the United Nations Charter had not hesitated to set forth all the grounds of discrimination in Article 1, and to repeat them in full in Articles 13, 55 and 76. The facts were real and well known to all. It could not be reiterated too often that millions of human beings suffered from such discriminatory practices, and the proposed draft convention should include a mention of that fact.

64. As regards the application of the convention in the Non-Self-Governing Territories, the opponents of the amendments had questioned the competence of the Commission on the Status of Women in the matter. It was a familiar move. Each time the Western Powers,

and particularly the colonial Powers, found themselves at a loss for arguments in their opposition to a progressive proposal, they resorted to the same pretext. That had happened in the Third Committee, during the consideration of agenda item 30, at the time of the discussion of draft resolution B, on the right of peoples to self-determination (E/2256, annex V). The argument was illogical. There was nothing in the terms of reference of the Commission on the Status of Women or in its rules of procedure to indicate that the status of women not of the white race did not concern it, or that women of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, whose position was the worst of all, did not come within its competence.

65. The logic of the colonial Powers was the logic of their own interests, and of the system of exploitation which brought profit to their ruling circles. The extent of the current liberation movement among oppressed peoples and nations was well known. To protect themselves, the colonial Powers spoke of their responsibilities; but they apparently forgot that the Charter of the United Nations laid down very clear responsibilities as regards the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. Attention had been drawn to their duties in the Syrian amendment (A/C.3/L.298/Rev.1) to draft resolution A on the right of self-determination, adopted by the Third Committee at the 460th meeting. Women represented one-half of the population of those territories, a fact which was taken into account in the USSR amendment to the draft convention on political rights of women. Many times in the past, in order to avoid applying certain progressive conventions in the Non-Self-Governing Territories, the colonial Powers had claimed that they must respect the right of the indigenous populations to express their wishes freely in the matter. On other occasions, particularly in the Third Committee recently, the same Powers had jealously defended their privilege of exclusive jurisdiction over those territories. Thus they relied on different and contradictory arguments at different times, depending on the circumstances, but the objective was always the same—to prevent the indigenous inhabitants from exercising their fundamental rights.

66. The article 5 proposed by the USSR delegation (A/C.3/L.327, point 4) was of capital importance to the oppressed women of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. The Byelorussian representative had drawn attention (476th meeting) to the infamous and criminal practices existing in Togoland. The French representative had replied that such practices were deeply rooted indigenous customs and that his Government was loath to eliminate them by force. But the colonial Powers had no such delicate feelings with regard to customs which were contrary to their own selfish interests; in such cases they did not hesitate to shed blood. One could not but conclude that they regarded only the most cruel and inhuman practices as worthy of respect.

67. The USSR amendments had been criticized on yet another score. It had been said that discrimination on the basis of race or ethnic origin was not practised exclusively against women, and that consequently there was no need for the Commission on the Status of Women to deal with the question. Such subtle arguments merely confused the issue. The principle of

racial discrimination was essentially the same in all cases; workers were exploited by means of the creation of underprivileged categories, to the greater benefit of the profiteers.

68. Under that general policy, women in the dependent territories were kept in a position of undeniable inferiority; they were exploited in three ways, as workers, as persons not of the white race, and as women. That system lowered the standard of living of families and helped to create a reserve of cheap manpower. Such was the result of any discrimination, whether it was based on sex, race or on ethnic origin. On the political level, discriminatory practices served to destroy the unity of the workers and undermine their sense of solidarity; that practice was called "divide and rule". Insidious methods of differentiation were used to set group against group. The situation was the same in the United States of America, in the Union of South Africa and in many colonies; and everywhere women were the victims of additional discrimination. In the United States of America, Negro women often went without medical care during confinement because the hospitals for Negroes were full and hospitals for whites refused to receive them. In the British colonies of Africa women received lower wages than men. The Government of the United Kingdom had itself pointed out that women's wages were from 20 to 100 per cent lower than men's in most of the dependent territories of the United Kingdom; that information was given in document E/CN.6/159, dated 2 February 1951, submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifth session. She also cited an article published in the *New York Times* on 30 November 1952, concerning the wretched plight of the women of the Wa Meru tribe in Tanganyika, a tribe 3,000 of whose members had been expelled from their village. Throughout all the colonies the picture was the same: expulsions, famine, a high rate of infant mortality. Women were vitally affected by such conditions, and were in no position to exercise any real political rights. Accordingly, it was essential that the USSR amendments should be adopted.

69. The example of Poland emphasized that need. Table VI in the Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2154) indicated that in Poland women had been entitled to vote since 1919. In actual fact, the economic and social conditions prevailing between the two world wars had prevented the majority of women from exercising that right. Women's wages had been 25 to 30 per cent lower than men's. Unemployment and want were everywhere and had weighed heavily upon women. Very few women had been admitted to the universities or to specialized employment; the majority had lived a hard life working in the fields or as domestics in the towns. Sixty per cent of the rural population had been illiterate, 90 per cent of that number being women. In the circumstances, the political rights of women had existed only on paper. The ruling circles had deliberately made sure that women would remain ignorant, in order to exploit them and prevent them from taking part in the political life of the country. The same situation existed in many capitalist countries.

70. The People's Republic of Poland, on the other hand, had given women the means of exercising their political rights. At the recent legislative elections,



women had been elected in each district. There were more than 15,000 women in the municipal and regional councils, and 270 in the magistracy, including one member of the Supreme Court. Women held management posts in the economic field, and were employed in the government. Polish women were active and alert citizens. That progress had been made possible by the establishment of proper social and economic conditions. All educational institutions had been opened to women; they could receive occupational training and become technicians, directors of factories or of rural co-operatives. One-half of the students enrolled in secondary schools were girls. Women received the same wages as men for equal work; the welfare of mothers and children was provided for. The State effectively guaranteed that women had in practice the same rights as men.

71. The contrast between the Poland of yesterday and the contemporary Poland was sufficient proof of the necessity of guaranteeing, by the adoption of practical measures, the exercise of the rights granted in theory. For that reason the USSR amendments should be adopted if the convention were to be truly effective.

72. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to document A/C.3/L.327/Rev.1, which contained a USSR amendment to the seven-Power draft resolution (A/C.3/L.330). The text of that amendment reproduced, with the appropriate modifications, the text of document A/C.3/L.327 and of document A/C.3/L.328, point 2. The USSR delegation had withdrawn

the amendment proposed in point 1 of document A/C.3/L.328, point 2. The USSR delegation had withdrawn the amendment proposed in point 1 of document A/C.3/L.328.

#### **Appointment of an acting chairman**

73. The CHAIRMAN pointed out that he would be called upon to attend the meeting of the General Committee on Monday afternoon, 15 December, and to preside at the meeting of the Economic and Social Council on Tuesday, 16 December. The Vice-Chairman being absent, the Chairman asked the Committee to designate a temporary Chairman to replace him for the two following meetings of the Committee.

74. Mrs. ROOSEVELT (United States of America) nominated the representative of Denmark as acting chairman.

75. Miss VAN DER MOLEN (Netherlands) and Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) seconded the nomination.

76. Mr. HUNEIDI (Syria) suggested that the representative of Denmark should act as chairman whenever the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman were both absent at the same time.

77. Mr. MEADE (United Kingdom) supported that suggestion.

*It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 1.5 p.m.