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Chairman: Mr. G. F. DAVIDSON (Canada).

Development of political rights of women in territories where these rights are not fully enjoyed (A/2430, chapter V B, section XII, paragraph 867, A/2452, A/C.3/L.345/Rev.1)

[Item 65]*

1. The CHAIRMAN opened the discussion on item 65 of the agenda, concerning the development of political rights of women in territories where those rights were not fully enjoyed. He noted that a draft resolution relating to the item had been submitted by Chile, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Greece, India, Indonesia and the Philippines (A/C.3/L.345/Rev.1).
2. Mr. AZMI (Egypt) said that the reference to Egypt in table IV of the Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2462) on constitutions, electoral laws and other legal instruments relating to the franchise of women and their eligibility to public offices and functions was incorrect. Egypt was not a country where women had no political rights. For a great many years they had been enjoying all the rights of eligibility to public office and functions embodied in article III of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (General Assembly resolution 640 (VII), annex); if table IV had been intended to refer only to articles I and II—the right to vote and to be eligible for election to publicly elected bodies—it should have been so stated. In any case, the Egyptian draft constitution currently being completed, which had been based largely upon the work of the Commission on Human Rights and the draft covenants on human rights, embodied provisions for equal enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights by men and women. Those provisions would almost certainly come into force within the next few months.
3. The Egyptian delegation, which had voted for Economic and Social Council resolution 504 F (XVI), would vote for the joint draft resolution (A/C.3/L.345/Rev.1) before the Committee.
4. Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic), introducing the joint draft resolution, said that her experience in the Trusteeship Council had convinced her that the Powers administering Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories were genuinely eager to promote the education of women in those territories. They

had accepted many suggestions by the Dominican delegation for raising the status of women to its proper level, as set forth in the United Nations Charter. But much remained to be done to improve women's enjoyment of political rights, not only in those territories but also in countries which had not yet revised their legislation to fit the new trend towards the political equality of women and men. Should the draft resolution be adopted, it would make obsolete the argument, still heard in some quarters, that women were not yet ready for the suffrage. The principle had been fully debated and it was to be hoped that unanimous agreement could be reached without much more ado.

5. Miss MANAS (Cuba) said that her delegation had joined that of the Dominican Republic in presenting the basic resolution in the Commission on the Status of Women. The draft resolution before the Committee was straightforward. It laid special stress on educational measures because education was the best means of raising people to the highest economic and social levels. Unfortunately, there were many countries in which equality of political rights did not exist or was only partly in force and there were others in which the enforcement of such rights was only starting. Equality of political rights in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories was particularly desirable. The documentation submitted to the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories at its fourth session had shown that economic and social factors had prevented women in such territories from obtaining proper education and thus becoming fitted to exercise the vote. To stimulate such education was the main purpose of the joint draft resolution before the Committee.

6. Mrs. TSALDARIS (Greece) drew attention to the important reference to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in the preamble of the joint draft resolution. Political rights had been achieved in most democracies; they had to be obtained all over the world. Greece had been one of the first countries to sign the Convention and the first to ratify it, on 3 September 1953. Full political rights had been granted to Greek women in 1952. It should be remembered that the Commission on the Status of Women had expressed the view that women should be included in the Trusteeship Council's visiting missions and had made several suggestions for changes in the Council's Questionnaire; those decisions were implicit in the joint draft resolution, of which her delegation was a sponsor. Particular attention should be paid to educational measures to fit women for the vote. In that connexion the work done by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in basic and adult education in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories might be used, but it should go hand in hand with the teaching of women's local and family responsibilities. Some use might be made of technical assistance in that respect.

7. Mrs. MARZUKI (Indonesia) observed that the fact that twenty-seven countries had signed the Con-

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

vention on the Political Rights of Women showed that there was more or less general agreement on the substance, although the Convention itself was only a first step towards the achievement of full political equality for women and men. It had been argued that the immediate granting of the franchise in the Trust and on-Self-Governing Territories might give rise to difficulties, since it might conflict with the traditions and customs of peoples only just emerging from primitive society, and that full equality for women could be achieved only in so far as the community would accept the concept. By the very fact of signing the Charter the Powers administering such territories had, however, pledged themselves to promote educational advancement there. Political rights for women would remain a dead letter if the granting of them was not preceded by the advancement of social and political education, which would in itself raise social standards and make women more politically minded.

8. The joint draft resolution was straightforward and should meet with ready acceptance.

9. Mrs. MITROVIC (Yugoslavia) supported the draft resolution.

10. Women enjoyed equal political rights with men in about sixty countries, but there were still nearly a score of independent States where they did not. Progress was still too slow. In the modern world, any measure of discrimination should be seen in the context of discrimination in general; and failure to accord the irrevocable right of women to vote, a right none but backward or reactionary men and women dared deny openly today, would be such a measure.

11. Pretexts for postponing the granting of political rights to women, such as political immaturity, and illiteracy, were invalid. Such objections had been met with in Yugoslavia, where the war against fascism had shown that the political consciousness of women, even when illiterate, was superior to that of collaborationist male politicians. Lack of learning, which the draft resolution perhaps over-emphasized by implication with its reference to education, was no bar to political comprehension. Moslem women in Yugoslavia, illiterate and veiled, had been given the vote none the less, and it had proved a spur to the acquisition of education. Accordingly, the draft resolution should urge the extension of full female suffrage without reservations on the score of education. Similarly, it should not be made a condition of female suffrage in the Trust Territories that women should speak the official language of the Territory.

12. Mrs. MENON (India) said that her country had signed the Convention on the Political Rights of Women with the reservation that article III should have no application as regarded recruitment into and conditions of service in any armed forces of India or the forces entrusted with the maintenance of public order there. That reservation had not been actuated by any discrimination based on sex, but had been intended merely as a first step towards the total elimination of armed force from civilized life.

13. Until her delegation had studied the Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2462), it had not realized the tragic implications of the Saudi Arabian representative's plea that the Third Committee should do something for human rights. That document showed that in Saudi Arabia, alone among the eighty-three countries dealt with, neither men nor women enjoyed political rights. She could assure the Saudi Arabian representa-

tive that the Third Committee would do all in its power to help him in his struggle for political rights. Much remained to be done in countries in which women had obtained the franchise, mainly in amending the relevant legislation. In Ecuador, both men and women had an equal right to vote, but the vote was compulsory for men, voluntary for women, whereas it should be the reverse, because women's participation in public life had been hampered by social and economic factors and they should accordingly be given a greater incentive to using their vote. In Lebanon, women had been enfranchised only in 1952; before that date, men had enjoyed adult suffrage, women none. The Lebanese delegation to the United Nations had urged freedom and justice with inimitable eloquence, but in Lebanon women had to have a certificate of education in order to vote, a condition not required for men. In Guatemala, a literacy qualification was required of women and their vote was optional, whereas for literate men it was compulsory, for illiterate men optional. That was tantamount to equating literate women with illiterate men. In Peru, voting was compulsory for men alone. In Haiti, under the 1950 Constitution, women would have full political rights by 1957. She wondered whether that odd-seeming provision concealed an intention to postpone the extension of full voting rights to women.

14. Throughout history, women's work had been taken for granted and they had been given their full rights only as a result of political upheaval, when their help was needed in consolidating political power. Thus, a right which should be normally enjoyed by all was usually obtained by women only if there was a political disturbance, an occurrence which everyone was anxious to avoid.

15. Only twenty-five countries had signed the Convention on the Political Rights of Women by August 1953, and in some of them discrimination as regards sex still existed. If it was permitted to continue, there seemed little point in having signed the Convention.

16. The principle of equality of political rights should be extended to the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, as laid down in the Charter of the United Nations. Actually, women in some of those territories enjoyed rights denied to their sisters in some Member States. States which did not grant full rights to their own women nationals would look ridiculous if they voted for a draft resolution calling for the extension of such rights to territories which enjoyed a more liberal administration.

17. The draft resolution represented the desire of the Commission on the Status of Women to do everything possible to advance the cause of women's rights. In that work the help of the relevant specialized agencies should not be overlooked. The draft resolution should be adopted because it would stimulate women's participation in public life.

18. Mr. CHAUVET (Haiti) explained that, before the 1950 Constitution, women in Haiti had not had the right to vote. They would vote in local elections in 1954, and in the next general election, which would take place in 1957; it was against that background of fact that the Indian representative's observation should be seen.

19. Mr. BAROODY (Saudi Arabia) said, in reply to the Indian representative, that the position of women in his country should be seen in relation to the social-political pattern. Democracy was supposed in many countries to reside in the use of ballot-papers and ballot-boxes; in Saudi Arabia women's rights were under the

effective care of Islamic law. Many countries using ballot-boxes presented a perversion of democracy; Saudi Arabia was a patriarchal State in the biblical sense, and more democratic than such countries.

20. Appointment of the representative of a tribe, which formed the basis of most of Saudi Arabian society, was made by consent of the whole tribe, arrived at after unhurried discussion in council. As in the United Kingdom, there was no written constitution, but the rights enjoyed by men and women were probably not inferior to those enjoyed in India or any other Asian country. Women in Saudi Arabia had owned property since the hejira, and they exercised great influence without the ballot and its concomitant self-advertisement, which was repugnant to Saudi Arabians.

21. Mr. AZKOUL (Lebanon), replying to the Indian representative, stated that the recent electoral law in Lebanon had extended the full franchise to women and had brought the situation with regard to the political rights of women into conformity with the position always adopted by the Lebanese delegation to the United Nations. Lebanese women had exercised their right to vote in a recent election.

22. Furthermore, representatives to the United Nations represented not merely the governments, but even more the peoples, of their respective countries, and it was their duty to interpret the main trends of public opinion and political development among those peoples rather than to reflect a precise legal situation. Even had the Lebanese electoral law not been passed, the Lebanese delegation would have been correct in defending the political rights of women in the United Nations, since the spirit of the country was favourable to such a position.

23. The draft resolution stated an unassailable principle and he would support it. There was, however, one observation which he wished to be conveyed to the Commission on the Status of Women. That organ had been established for the purpose of preparing recommendations and developing proposals relating to the rights of women in order to enable the Third Committee and the Economic and Social Council to promote action by the United Nations, by the specialized agencies, and by governments. Instead, however, of studying the problems and proposing concrete measures the Commission had, in effect, asked the Third Committee to do so, and the sponsors of the draft resolution had fallen into the same error. Resolution 504 F (XVI) of the Economic and Social Council, to which the draft resolution referred, invited the General Assembly and the Trusteeship Council in collaboration with the governments of all States which administered territories to take all necessary measures for the development of political rights of women in such territories. It was, however, for the Commission on the Status of Women, and not for the General Assembly through the Third Committee, to indicate to governments what measures they should take.

24. Thus the draft resolution obscured the delineation of the separate responsibilities of the various United Nations organs. It was to be hoped that in future care would be taken to see that one United Nations organ did not shift its responsibilities to another.

25. Mr. VENKATARAMAN (India) explained to the Committee, and to the representative of Haiti, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia in particular, that in discussing the progress of the rights of women in those countries Mrs. Menon had intended no slur on them. India's traditional respect, admiration and tolerance

for political and social systems different from its own were well known, and he wished to express his own respect and admiration for the system prevailing in Saudi Arabia. In discussing the rights of women, however, it was necessary to review the situation in different countries, and he hoped that the Committee would not misunderstand his colleague's purpose in doing that.

26. Mr. MENESES PALLARES (Ecuador) was in sympathy with the aims of the draft resolution. He agreed with the Lebanese representative that it was for the Commission on the Status of Women to propose concrete measures for the development of the rights of women, but felt that that was implicit in the terms of the draft resolution.

27. The reference in the draft resolution to Economic and Social Council resolution 504 F (XVI) implied the extension of the aims and objects of the draft resolution to Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, a measure which he supported.

28. The progress made towards women's enjoyment of full political rights (A/2462), as indicated in the memorandum by the Secretary-General (A/2462) was gratifying; and the time appeared not far distant when anything less than full enjoyment of such rights would be an anachronism.

29. He disagreed with the Indian representative's interpretation of the optional right to vote enjoyed by women in Ecuador. It was a wise legal provision, allowing for the evident hardship which might be inflicted on women if they were compelled to vote when seriously handicapped, for instance by pregnancy. Women's political rights in Ecuador were in no way inferior to those of men. They had enjoyed such rights long before the signing of the Charter of the United Nations, in fact since 1929, and his country had signed the Convention on Political Rights of Women in 1953.

30. Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) recalled that the question before the Committee had already been debated at length in the Commission on the Status of Women, in the Economic and Social Council, and in the General Assembly at its seventh session. The Byelorussian Government had signed the Convention on the Political Rights of Women because it had considered that the measure would represent a step forward, although no guarantees were provided for the implementation of the rights and no reference was made to extension of the provisions of the Convention to women in the Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories.

31. Women in the Byelorussian SSR enjoyed absolutely equal rights with men in all aspects of political, economic and social life. The Byelorussian Constitution did not confine itself to statements of rights, but provided all the necessary conditions for their implementation. In view of that fortunate state of affairs, her Government considered it essential to extend full political rights to women in countries where such rights were not yet enjoyed.

32. No progress could be made in achieving the enjoyment of human rights for all unless women were fully emancipated. Countries which professed the full emancipation of women, however, had failed to sign even such a restricted instrument as the Convention on the Political Rights of Women. In most such countries, women did not enjoy full political rights owing to the voting qualifications imposed. There was discrimination against women in capitalist States which

alleged that equality of opportunity for men and women had been achieved in their territories. Equal economic opportunity was a basic condition of equality between men and women, yet there were cases of discrimination against women in the economic field. The education of women also lagged behind that of men in many countries and territories and many flagrant instances of racial discrimination could be quoted.

33. The draft resolution before the Committee was an attempt, however limited and inadequate, to extend the provisions of the Economic and Social Council's resolution on the subject to all States and Territories; she would therefore vote for it, although the reference to educational measures was insufficient without full guarantees of the economic and social conditions which were essential to the implementation of women's rights.

34. Mr. YU (China) stated that his delegation attached great importance to the question before the Committee because history had shown the dire consequences which were liable to result from the denial of rights to important sections of a population. Formerly, many countries, including his own, had not deemed it necessary to emphasize the political rights of women through legislative measures and had considered that the traditional ethical concept of the equality of men and women was sufficient; as time went by, the need for more concrete recognition of the principle was becoming universally acknowledged.

35. The United Nations had rightly taken the initiative in achieving recognition of the principle. Twenty-seven States had signed the Convention on the Political Rights of Women; those States included Ethiopia and Guatemala, to which a special tribute should be paid, because they were among the countries where, according to the Secretariat document, women did not yet enjoy full political rights. The Committee bore a great responsibility for the moulding of world public opinion; representatives should bear in mind that that responsibility far outweighed any political and pragmatic considerations. He welcomed the stress laid on education in the draft resolution, since education was the best means of remedying the evils which beset the world.

36. The Chinese Constitution provided for political rights of women on an equal basis with men, and women consequently held public posts at all levels. His delegation had voted for Economic and Social Council resolution 504 F (XVI) and would support the joint draft resolution (A/C.3/L.345/Rev. 1), in the belief that world tension was due, to a great extent, to the inequality between various groups.

37. Mr. JOUBLANC RIVAS (Mexico) supported the draft resolution but asked its sponsors to bring the Spanish text into conformity with the English, French and Russian texts by replacing the word *enseñanza* (instruction) by *educación* (education), which was a broader term.

38. Mrs. PINTO DE VIDAL (Uruguay) agreed with the Mexican representative's proposal that the draft resolution should embody the idea of education, as opposed to mere instruction. Provided that proposal was adopted, she would vote for the draft resolution. It should, however, be understood that general education, and not merely civic education, was urged.

39. Women's rights, which were increasing throughout the world, were an essential feature of human rights and one in connexion with which Uruguay,

which had given women the vote in 1932, had always taken a leading part. The Uruguayan representative had been responsible for drafting the Bogotá Convention, and had played a leading part in the preparation of the United Nations Convention on the Political Rights of Women.

40. Mr. MUFTI (Syria), while appreciating the intentions of the sponsors of the joint draft resolution, thought that it was a somewhat feeble culmination of the endeavours of the subordinate organs which had worked so long on the subject. It omitted the last paragraph of Council resolution 504 F (XVI) and paid no heed to the hope expressed by the Commission on the Status of Women that the Administering Authorities of Trust Territories would reply in detail to all the questions on the status of women in the revised questionnaire (A/2430, para. 868). The only example given in the draft resolution of measures leading to the development of the political rights of women was that of educational measures, whereas legislative measures were just as important and probably more effective. Undoubtedly education was a prerequisite, but such education should be civic education of an appropriate type, should be given equally to all, should be inspired by national history and traditions and should concentrate on preparing women to participate in the political life and the defence of the legitimate interests of their country. Such education would be especially important in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories. It should be provided for in national legislation and should be given without discrimination, particularly avoiding the existing and unfortunate tendency to create dissident groups.

41. In order to include those ideas in the draft resolution he submitted relevant amendments (A/C.3/L.347).

42. Miss MAÑAS (Cuba) explained to the Syrian representative that the sponsors of the draft resolution had not restated the last paragraph of Economic and Social Council resolution 504 F (XVI) because it was already incumbent on the Secretary-General, under that resolution, to report to the Commission on the Status of Women. With regard to the Syrian representative's proposal for the inclusion of a request to the Trusteeship Council, she drew his attention to resolution 504 K (XVI) of the Economic and Social Council, on the Questionnaire on Trust Territories as it related to the status of women. That resolution had not been transmitted to the General Assembly and there seemed to be no need to transmit it. She therefore urged the Syrian representative to withdraw his amendment.

43. In reply to the Lebanese and Ecuadorian representatives, who had advanced the view that the Commission on the Status of Women should have submitted some suggestions on problems of women's education, she referred to the report of the Sub-Committee on Education of the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories¹ and to certain records of that Committee (A/AC.35/SR.78 and A/AC.35/SR.80), which embodied concrete recommendations on the subject. In making some of those recommendations, her delegation, which was also represented on the Commission on the Status of Women, had borne in mind the need to extend educational facilities for women throughout the world, and not only to the Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories.

¹ See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Eighth Session, Supplement No. 15*, part two.

44. Mr. CASTRILLO (Bolivia) fully supported the principle of the joint draft resolution, but considered that its wording was inadequate. It should be expanded and improved by inclusion of the Syrian amendment. The Syrian proposal that reference should be made to legislative as well as educational measures was especially interesting. The Bolivian Government had recently introduced universal suffrage, without any of the qualifications with regard to education which were implied in the draft resolution before the Committee. Thus, the illiterate women who constituted a large proportion of the population were not denied their fundamental political rights. The political status of women was closely linked with their social status; the latter was being improved in Bolivia by means of land reforms and a revision of the educational system.

45. In view of his Government's advanced concept of the methods by which women's political rights should be extended, he could not vote for a restrictive

resolution and hoped that the Syrian amendment would be accepted.

46. Mr. MUFTI (Syria) stated, in reply to the Cuban representative, that he was fully aware of the scope of the Economic and Social Council resolutions to which she had referred. Nevertheless, the draft resolution in its existing form contained no new suggestions. The Committee's task was to reflect the work done by the subsidiary organs of the General Assembly and to formulate concrete recommendations. The purpose of the last paragraph of his amendment was to avoid waste of time by requesting the Secretary-General to report directly to the Assembly, instead of waiting for the report of the Commission on the Status of Women; that proposal differed substantially from the last paragraph of Economic and Social Council resolution 504 F (XVI).

47. In view of those considerations, he would not withdraw his amendment.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.