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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Ninth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-THIRD MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Friday, 18 March 1955, at 11.10 a.m.

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PRESENT:

<u>Chairman:</u>	Miss BERNARDINO	Dominican Republic
<u>Rapporteur:</u>	Mrs. RÖSSEL	Sweden
<u>Members:</u>	Mrs. CHAMORRO ALAMAN	Argentina
	Mrs. DALY	Australia
	Mrs. NOVIKOVA	Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
	Miss TSENG	China
	Miss MAÑAS	Cuba
	Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX	France
	Mrs. GUERY	Haiti
	Miss ROESAD	Indonesia
	Mrs. TABET	Lebanon
	Begum ANWAR AHMED	Pakistan
	Mrs. DEMBINSKA	Poland
	Mrs. FOMINA	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
	Mrs. SAYERS	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
	Mrs. HAHN	United States of America
	Mrs. SANCHEZ de URDANETA	Venezuela
	Mrs. MITROVIC	Yugoslavia
<u>Also present:</u>	Mrs. LOPEZ	Colombia
	Mrs. KIEP	Germany
	Mrs. de TEJEIRA	Panama

Representatives of specialized agencies:

Mrs. FIGUEROA	International Labour Organisation
Miss SALAS	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Representatives of an inter-governmental organization:

Mrs. LEYES de CHAVES)	Inter-American Commission of Women
Mrs. de CALVO )	

PRESENT (cont'd):

Representatives of non-governmental organizations:

<u>Category A:</u>	Miss SENDER	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
	Mr. THORMANN	International Federation of Christian Trade Unions
	Miss KAHN	World Federation of Trade Unions
	Mrs. FOX	World Federation of United Nations Associations

Category B and Register:

	Miss GUTHRIE	International Alliance of Women
	Mr. LONGARZO	International Conference of Catholic Charities
	Mrs. CARTER ) Mrs. FREEMAN)	International Council of Women
	Mrs. HYMER	International Federation of Business and Professional Women
	Miss LAGEMANN	International Federation of Friends of Young Women
	Miss ROBB	International Federation of University Women
	Miss SMITH	International Federation of Women Lawyers
	Mrs. WOLLE-EGENOLF	International League for the Rights of Man
	Mrs. ROBERTS	Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations; Associated Country Women of the World
	Miss JOLLY	Society of Comparative Legislation
	Mrs. WALSER	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
	Miss ZIZZAMIA	World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations
	Miss FORSYTH	World's Young Women's Christian Association

PRESENT (cont'd):

Secretariat:

Mr. HUMPHREY

Director, Division of Human  
Rights

Mrs. TENISON-WOODS

Chief of the Status of Women  
Section

Mrs. GRINBERG-VINAVER

Secretary of the Commission

POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN: (a) ANNUAL REPORT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN (A/2962; E/CN.6/L.155/Rev.1, E/CN.6/L.156/Rev.1); (b) REPORTS ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN TRUST AND NON-SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES (E/CN.6/255, E/CN.6/260 and Add.1 and 2) (continued)

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America), replying to a query from the Indonesian representative, explained that the draft resolution she had sponsored jointly with the United Kingdom representative (E/CN.6/L.156/Rev.1), far from reducing the number of countries to be listed in the Secretary-General's report, would have the effect of adding four countries now members of United Nations specialized agencies: Nepal, San Marino, Spain and Viet-Nam. In fact, the proposal was intended to broaden the scope of the report: it would ensure the inclusion of any States coming within the three categories mentioned in the first operative paragraph.

Mrs. FOMINA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) felt, on the contrary, that the joint draft resolution was restrictive in that it did not cover States which were not Members of the United Nations or of the specialized agencies or parties to the Statute of the International Court. Information on the political rights of women in such States was equally essential. Accordingly, she moved that the first operative paragraph should be amended to read: "...all States, whether or not they are Members of the United Nations..."

Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic), recalling that past Commission resolutions had called for information from both Member and non-Member States, saw no reason to limit the scope of the Secretary-General's report and supported the USSR amendment. If that amendment were not adopted, she would find it difficult to vote for the joint draft.

Miss TSENG (China) supported the joint draft as it stood. The three categories it mentioned included all the States with which the United Nations was in contact. It would be difficult to obtain information from other States because the Secretariat had no contact with them and any data collected were not

(Miss Tseng, China)

likely to be official. There was nothing, however, to prevent the Secretariat from receiving information voluntarily provided by other States and from appending it to the Secretary-General's report.

Mrs. DEMBINSKA (Poland) considered that the Secretary-General's report could only render full service to the Commission if it covered women of all countries. The additional work involved in approaching non-Member States would be offset by the valuable and comprehensive data obtained. Poland therefore supported the USSR amendment.

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America) thought that the Commission should ask for a ruling from the Economic and Social Council regarding the States it could appropriately approach for information.

Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) thought the United States request revealed a lack of confidence in the Secretary-General.

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America) assured the Commission that her delegation had full confidence in the Secretary-General. It would not be fruitful, however, to consider the USSR amendment in the Commission; the question it raised could better be decided by the Economic and Social Council on the basis of general United Nations procedures. It was the Economic and Social Council which had authorized the Secretary-General's report (A/2692), and, therefore, it was the Council which should consider any controversial question which might arise in connexion with the report. She would therefore revise the joint draft resolution (E/CN.6/L.156/Rev.1) by inserting, immediately after "The Commission on the Status of Women", the clause "Recommends that the Economic and Social Council adopt the following resolution":

The CHAIRMAN suggested that the joint draft resolution (E/CN.6/L.156/Rev.1), as further revised, should be referred to the Resolutions Committee.

It was so agreed.

EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK: (a) PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK (E/CN.6/257); (b) REPORT ON METHODS WHICH HAVE BEEN FOUND USEFUL IN CREATING A FAVOURABLE CLIMATE OF PUBLIC OPINION ON THE NEED FOR EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK (E/CN.6/263) (continued)

Mrs. FOMINA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the question of equal pay for equal work was of urgent concern to most women. As the statements of the members of the Commission and the representatives of non-governmental organizations showed, there was direct dissatisfaction of women with the slow progress made in the implementation of the principle, and in connexion with that a movement of women developed equal pay for equal work in many countries.

In order to achieve equal pay for equal work, it was essential to create a favourable climate of public opinion, and many non-governmental organizations were conducting useful campaigns to that end. The Secretary-General's report contained certain interesting information on the methods that were being used to encourage women to co-operate in the struggle, in particular through public meetings, women's organizations' activities and the press. Unfortunately the report only referred briefly to the most important method of enforcing the principle of equal pay for equal work, namely legislation.

Her delegation had always felt that the most constructive approach to the problem was to recommend that States should enact the necessary legislation and at its eighth session the Commission had adopted a resolution to that effect which had later been approved unfortunately in a worse amended form by the Economic and Social Council. In countries with no legislative provisions on women's work, the application of the principle was limited or entirely nullified by local regulations or by the arbitrary actions of employers.

The USSR was in favour of immediate implementation of the principle of equal pay for equal work everywhere. In the USSR women were granted equal political and economic rights. Under article 118 of the Constitution women were guaranteed the right to work and to equal pay for equal work, which was fully implemented in practice. In addition, women enjoyed all the economic and social advantages offered by the State. Soviet women had unrestricted access to

(Mrs. Fomina, USSR)

employment and held posts at all levels, the remuneration of a worker being determined solely by his competence and skill and not by his sex. The first step was to enact the necessary legislation and then to ensure that the law was obeyed.

In many highly developed countries, however, no satisfactory solution to the problem had been found. The United Kingdom representative had stated that her Government had not yet solved the problem and had only recently applied the principle in the civil service. Such a situation could not be reassuring to women. As far as was known from the official Government data, there were about seven million women workers in the United Kingdom. In the United States the Bureau of Labor had reported that only one third of the states had enacted legislation on equal pay for equal work, and women were still pressing their claims and calling for a more radical solution. That showed the facts of discrimination against women in the United States in that field.

In defence of the discrimination against women workers many countries had alleged that women did not perform work of equal value. It was also alleged that because of their family responsibilities men were entitled to higher remuneration than women but there was much evidence in the Secretary-General's report to show that in many cases women were forced to act as the family breadwinners or to provide for dependent parents. Moreover, as the Polish representative had rightly pointed out, the solution of the problem was also of vital concern to men.

Despite its shortcomings the ILO Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value was a useful step forward but it should be implemented more rapidly. On that point she agreed with the Polish representative. The lower remuneration of women workers was a factor in the political inequality of women and for that reason the Economic and Social Council and the Commission should increase their efforts to do away with discrimination against women workers.

Mrs. RÖSSEL (Sweden) expressed her appreciation to the Secretary-General and the non-governmental organizations for the valuable information contained in the Secretary-General's report. She hoped that the Commission



(Mrs. Rössel, Sweden)

would continue to receive such information in future and that all the non-governmental organizations, including those representing the trade unions, would continue to co-operate with the Commission in that work.

In considering the question of equal pay for equal work it was essential to know not only the number of women employed but also the type of job at which they were working. Women must not be confined to the lower-paid jobs or to traditionally female occupations. They must be helped to enter all occupations and should be eligible for promotion on an equal footing with men. The trend in Sweden was clearly in that direction.

Another important factor was the number of years the woman worker was available on the labour market and the related question of whether women continued to work after marriage. In Sweden women were tending to remain longer in gainful employment and the percentage of married women in the labour force was increasing. Although it was still difficult for women to re-enter the labour market after an absence of several years, the opportunities for older women workers had also improved.

The problem was closely related to the question of training and the willingness of employers to provide and of girls to take advantage of facilities to train for a skilled job. The lack of such facilities and failure to make use of them also affected the wage scale.

The attitude of employers and workers was also important. The Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions and the Swedish Employers' Confederation had been considering the problem of equal pay for equal work for a number of years. In 1951 a sub-committee on female labour had been set up as part of the Joint Committee on Labour Market Problems and had submitted a report on equal pay in Swedish industry. The report analysed the position of women in industry, and their employment and remuneration as compared with that of male workers and its conclusions and recommendations had been adopted by both Confederations. The Joint Committee had found that men and women's wages should be based on the principle of equal wages for work of equal value, i.e. "the work performed". In that connexion she pointed out that the corresponding phrase in the ILO Convention was "the work to be performed" a wording which she preferred. In September 1954 the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions had adopted a resolution at its representative assembly stating that the economic development in Sweden would allow some improvement in the wage-earner's income level in

(Mrs. Rössel, Sweden)

1955 and that such improvements might be made without any general rise in price levels. The Confederation had also stated that special attention should be given to women's wages in collective bargaining for higher wages for all workers. The Central Organization of Salaried Employees, the trade union organization representing white collar workers, had also adopted a resolution urging that special attention should be given to women's salaries. A royal commission appointed in 1947 to make recommendations on the question of equal pay in the civil service had reported in 1953 that in its view the authorities could and should take successive measures to bring about complete application of the principle of equal pay for equal work. That recommendation was designed to correct certain inequities which still obtained, but which would in her opinion be removed in the near future. The principle of equal pay for equal work had been accepted by the civil service in 1925.

The trade union organizations were attempting to reduce the difference in the wages paid at the highest and lowest levels in private industry. As a result of collective bargaining, aiming to improve the wages as well as to meet the increased cost of living since 1946 wages at the top levels had been increased by approximately 80 per cent while the lowest categories had received increases of about 150 per cent. Women had thus benefited both from the general increase in wages and from the trend to bring women's wages up to the level of those paid to men. The present discrepancy between the wages of men and women workers in Sweden had decreased by 3 to 5 per cent and was steadily decreasing, but still women's wages in industry were only between 72 to 83 per cent of those of men.

Listening to the Haitian representative's comments, she had realized that it was sometimes easier to adopt the principle of equal pay for equal work in a young country than to eradicate the long-established practices of wage-fixing of an older nation. Government interference in wage-fixing would not be welcomed in Sweden by labour or management. The legislation enacted applied only to State employees.

Progress towards the improvement of working conditions for women had been slow, partly because women were not sufficiently active in pressing their interests in the trade union organizations. The membership of women of the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions had grown from 185,000 in 1946 to

(Mrs. Rössel, Sweden)

approximately 275,000 in 1954. Approximately 20 per cent of the members were women. The membership of women of the Central Organization of Salaried Employees had grown during the same period from 68,000 to 120,000 women workers forming approximately one third of the membership. Although efforts were being made to increase women's participation in the trade unions, there were few women members of union executive boards or the bargaining committees even in unions where women members predominated. The secretary for women's affairs of the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions had attributed the delay in the implementation of equal pay for equal work in part to the scarcity of women delegates at trade union conferences on collective bargaining and at wage negotiations. That was an important field where women could directly influence the wages and working conditions of women workers.

The question of equal pay for equal work would continue to be an important issue in the negotiation of wage contracts. In Sweden both labour and management realized that it was not merely a matter of raising wage scales but also of creating opportunities for vocational training adapted to women's abilities and interests. That in turn would enable women to secure better jobs with wider prospects of promotion. Research had shown that absenteeism, a crucial issue in all negotiations for equal pay, tended to decrease as women were given higher pay and jobs with more responsibility. Too little information was as yet available on those questions to permit any far-reaching conclusions. Accordingly, the Swedish delegation was submitting for the Commission's consideration a draft resolution on equal pay for equal work (E/CN.6/L.160) designed to elicit further information on methods found useful in various countries for the promotion of equality of remuneration for men and women workers and on the present position in various countries.

Mrs. CHAMORRO ALAMAN (Argentina) said that it was sometimes more difficult to obtain economic rights for women than other rights because Governments were reluctant to accept the immediate responsibilities involved in the adoption of the principle of equal pay for equal work. However, progress was being made, thanks to the constructive efforts of the United Nations and other organizations, as well as Governments. The question of equal pay was closely connected with the items on economic and educational opportunities for women, and should not be considered separately.

(Mrs. Chamorro Alaman, Argentina)

In Argentina, social legislation was progressive and the principle of equal pay for equal work was not only recognized, but implemented. The Constitution safeguarded the rights of all workers, without distinction of sex, by providing for a fair remuneration of their work. The principle was implemented in collective agreements, in which wages were fixed for the kind of work, without reference to the sex of the workers. Some low-salary posts were occupied entirely by women, but that was due to the type of work; men would be paid the same salaries if they took such posts. Argentine women had opportunities for vocational training and were active in the trade unions. Furthermore, the Government encouraged trade union activities and co-operation between employers and employees with a view to raising the economic level of the country and improving the conditions of all workers. Women were thus able to contribute to the well-being both of their families and of the community.

Miss TSENG (China) said that although the principle of equal pay for equal work was recognized in China, it was not applied equally to all categories of workers. In a first category, which included members of the liberal professions and representatives in the legislative and national assemblies, 25 per cent of whom were women, women were paid the same salaries as men and also had access to the highest posts. A second category of workers, which included nearly half of all women workers, were mainly employed in industry, agriculture, trade and communications. They were paid the same wages as men; they had fewer opportunities for promotion. The same was true of the third category, government employees, where very few women reached policy-making positions. On the other hand, women enjoyed certain privileges.

Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that consideration should be given to what had already been done in the field of equal pay for equal work, and recalled that at its eighth session, the Commission had adopted a resolution urging States to take legislative and other action to establish and carry into effect the principle of equal pay for equal work and to encourage the activities of the non-governmental organizations to that end. The Economic and Social Council had adopted the same resolution, with some

(Mrs. Novikova, Byelorussian SSR)

amendments, at its eighteenth session. The International Labour Organisation had drawn up the Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value. In spite of some shortcomings, that was a step forward.

Recommendations and appeals had been made to Governments, but they had had little effect. The United States representative had been able to mention only thirteen states in which equal pay for equal work was an accepted principle. In the United Kingdom, women civil servants were still paid less than men. Even if the new programme announced in January 1955 were implemented over the next seven years, British women civil servants would not be on a footing of equality with men until 1962. In industry, they would have even longer to wait. The position was similar in the Netherlands, New Zealand and Australia, and even worse in the Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories, where women were employed to do the hardest work at lower wages than men.

The Commission should consider what action to take in view of the indifference of Governments to its recommendations. It must realize that equality in other fields could only be achieved if economic equality was an accepted fact. It should therefore adopt a strongly-worded resolution stressing the necessity for implementation of the recommendations already made.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.