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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Eighth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SECOND MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 24 March 1954 at 10.55 a.m.

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12p.

PRESENT:

<u>Chairman:</u>	Miss BERNARDINO	Dominican Republic
<u>Rapporteur:</u>	Mrs. FIROUZ	Iran
<u>Members:</u>	DAW NGWE KHIN	Burma
	Mrs. NOVIKOVA	Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
	Miss GONZALEZ	Chile
	Miss YANG	China
	Miss MAÑAS	Cuba
	Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX	France
	Mrs. GUERY	Haiti
	Mrs. TABET	Lebanon
	Begum ANWAR AHMED	Pakistan
	Mrs. DEMBINSKA	Poland
	Mrs. ROSSEL	Sweden
	Mrs. FOMINA	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
	Mrs. WARDE	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. FLOURET	Argentina
	Mrs. de CALVO	Inter-American Commission of Women

Representatives of specialized agencies:

Mrs. FIGUEROA	International Labour Organisation
Mrs. GRUZ-SANTOS	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Representatives of non-governmental organizations:

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

Representatives of non-governmental organizations: (cont'd)Category B and Register:

Mrs. JONES	Associated Country Women of the World
Mrs. MAHON) Mrs. GUTHRIE)	International Alliance of Women
Miss BENDER	International Co-operative Women's Guild
Miss DINGMAN	International Council for Child Welfare
Mrs. REGISTER	International Council of Women
Mrs. HYMER) Miss RANDALL)	International Federation of Business and Professional Women
Miss ROBB	International Federation of University Women
Mrs. MAKINEN-OLLINEN	International Federation of Women Lawyers
Mrs. WOLLE-EGENOLF) Mrs. WISHNER)	International League for the Rights of Man
Mrs. FOWLER) Miss EVANS) Miss SCHAIN)	Pan-Pacific Women's Association
Mrs. RUSSEL	Women's International Democratic Federation
Mrs. WALSER	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Miss SCHAEFER) Miss WEBER)	World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations
Mrs. POLSTEIN	World Union for Progressive Judaism
Miss ARNOLD) Miss FORSYTH)	World's Young Women's Christian Association
<u>Secretariat:</u> Mrs. TENISON-WOODS	Chief of the Status of Women's Section
Mrs. GRINBERG-VINAVER	Secretary of the Commission

METHOD OF WORK OF THE COMMISSION

The CHAIRMAN reverted to her earlier suggestion that the Commission should set up a committee on resolutions and a committee on communications. It was understood that representatives other than the members of the two committees could participate in the discussions without vote, and that the committees were free to choose their own officers.

She proposed the establishment of a committee on resolutions with the following membership: the representatives of France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United States of America, Cuba, Sweden, Venezuela and Yugoslavia.

It was so agreed.

She further proposed the establishment of a committee on communications with the following membership: the representatives of Pakistan, the United Kingdom, Poland, Lebanon and Iran.

It was so agreed.

The CHAIRMAN called for a decision on the indefinite postponement of consideration of sub-items (d) and (e) of agenda item 3.

Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) and Mrs. FOMINA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) drew attention to the importance of the subjects referred to in sub-items (d) and (e). They asked for assurances that the Commission would continue to receive the information regularly transmitted to the Secretary-General and would have an opportunity of expressing its views upon it and taking whatever action it deemed fitting.

Mrs. TENISON-WOODS (Secretariat), after giving those assurances, pointed out that what was being deferred was the publication of two documents which had previously been requested. The first, the survey on women in public services and functions, would consist of a restatement in narrative form of information received over a period of years, for purposes of publication as a popular pamphlet. A preliminary draft of such a survey had been issued as a confidential

document (SW/MISC.1) during the Commission's previous session, but had proved very inadequate: it was both incomplete and out of date. The second document, a suggested complete report by the Secretary-General on women in political and public life to be issued perhaps in 1955, would require a great deal of time and work. The structures of the governments of at least the sixty Member States would have to be studied and figures obtained on the number of women participating in the different branches of their respective governments. The information required could only effectively be elicited by addressing a formal request to governments. While the resulting document would be a most interesting one from an information point of view, she suggested that it was more important to obtain replies to the extensive questionnaires to which many governments had not yet had time to reply on family law and property rights, and to restrict, so far as possible, the number of requests for information to vital matters on which United Nations organs wished to take positive action. Moreover, by the time governments could return the answers to the new questionnaire and the document issued, the information requested would again be not up to date. Finally, as many governments would probably not reply to the request for information, the proposed publication was likely to be based on inadequate information and might even have the effect of penalizing governments which had replied honestly and fully, for it laid them open to criticism by governments which might not even have replied at all. The latter view had been strongly expressed by some members of the Economic and Social Council.

The Commission was, of course, free to decide as it wished; but the Secretary-General reserved the right to suggest, at a later stage of the agenda, that since the Council had strongly urged its functional commissions to reconsider their work programmes periodically with a view to fixing priorities and postponing or even eliminating less vital items, publication of the two documents under discussion should be indefinitely deferred.

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America) did not object to deferring the two sub-items of agenda item 3, but suggested that they should be placed on the agenda of the Commission's ninth session in order to be sure that they would be considered at that time.

The CHAIRMAN called for a vote on the indefinite postponement of consideration of sub-items (d) and (e) under agenda item 3.

The proposal was adopted by 17 votes to none, with no abstentions.

POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN (continued)

- (a) MEMORANDUM PREPARED ANNUALLY BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN (A/2462; E/CN.6/L.122)
- (b) REPORT ON WAYS IN WHICH EQUAL POLITICAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN MAY BE ACHIEVED AND MADE EFFECTIVE (E/CN.6/244; E/CN.6/L.121/Rev.1)
- (c) REPORTS ON POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN TRUST AND NON-SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES (E/CN.6/235, 237, 239 and Add.1)

The CHAIRMAN, referring to the first paragraph of the preamble of the joint draft resolution on agenda item 3 (a), noted that only three States had actually deposited their instruments of ratification.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) suggested that the final operative paragraph should be reworded to read: "Reiterates its appeal to Member States of the United Nations and makes the same appeal to non-member States which have been invited by the General Assembly to sign, ratify or accede to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women".

The draft resolution, as amended, was adopted by 16 votes to none, with 2 abstentions.

Mrs. WARDE (United Kingdom), explaining her abstention, pointed out that it was not the practice of the United Kingdom Government to assume obligations under a convention until it was in a position to fulfil them. As women were still under certain disabilities in political life in the United Kingdom, for example with regard to the House of Lords, and entry into the fighting services, it would be inconsistent for the United Kingdom Government to appeal to other States to do what it could not itself carry out.

With regard to the revised draft resolution on ways in which equal political rights for women could be achieved and made effective (E/CN.6/L.121/Rev.1), of which the United Kingdom was a co-sponsor, she requested deferment of its consideration pending consultation among the sponsors.

It was so agreed.

Mrs. WALSER (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) said that her organization had made a detailed statement on the question of political rights of women at the Commission's seventh session and she would now briefly emphasize two points.

Firstly, it was essential that all women should obtain political rights and she welcomed the Commission's efforts to suggest ways in which political rights for women could be achieved and made effective, in particular through legislation and political education. The attainment of those rights, however, was part of the larger question of fundamental human rights and the principle of the equal rights of men and women as laid down in the Charter. The attainment of political rights for women as well as for men should be viewed from that standpoint.

Secondly, women who already enjoyed political rights must help to obtain those rights for women who were still denied them. The mere possession of political rights was not enough; women must also participate actively in the political life of their countries. They must not demand preferential treatment on the basis of sex or justify their inaction on the grounds of discrimination or of unequal status owing to a "cultural lag". They could win the esteem of their countrymen only by hard work, intelligent planning and a willingness to share the responsibility for improving conditions through political action. They must demonstrate their ability to make a significant contribution to the political life of their country. When women who now enjoyed political rights had achieved that purpose, her organization believed that it would be easier to obtain political rights for women everywhere in the world.

Mrs. RUSSELL (Women's International Democratic Federation) stated that although considerable progress had been achieved with regard to the political rights of women since the United Nations had come into being, in some areas, particularly in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, women were still little better than slaves. In its work with the women of those Territories, her organization had found that they had a deep faith in the principles and the power of the United Nations. Reports from those Territories showed that those women had a firmer grasp of women's needs and problems than many women in more advanced

countries. Political education alone was not enough for women to achieve greater power, perhaps because it taught them established customs and ideas. It was only by organizing themselves into large groups through which they could make their wishes felt, that women would be able to participate in the running of their countries' affairs and in the disposition of the national wealth to which they contributed such a large share.

In conclusion, she urged the Commission to use its powers and influence to improve the status of women rapidly, rather than wait for the slow process of evolution.

Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) stated that the available documents did not always give an accurate picture of the situation of women in the Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories. For example, it was stated in the report of the Trusteeship Council (A/2427) that the women of Western Samoa enjoyed equal rights with men and had full access to all public and government posts. The fact of the matter was, however, that the rights of the indigenous population of that Territory were generally limited, heads of family alone being allowed to vote, and to vote only for members of the Fono of Faipule, an indigenous advisory body. No attempt to extend the rights of women or, for that matter, of men, was made in the proposed constitutional reform, as could be seen from the statement by the Prime Minister of New Zealand.

Concerning Nauru, she noted that it was not clear from the Secretariat document E/CN.6/235 how the elections of 15 December 1951 had been carried out, and whether women had been able to take part in them.

As regards the Cameroons under French Administration, according to a statement made by the representative of the Union des Populations du Cameroun at the eighth session of the General Assembly (A/C.4/SR.393), only women who were the mothers of two children were allowed to vote, and that provision could only be changed by action of the French Parliament in which the peoples of the Cameroons were represented by only three out of a total of 627 representatives. It would therefore appear that educated women who had no children could not vote in that Territory, and that the progress of women there was held back by the selfish policy of the Administering Authorities, rather than by custom or

religion, as some representatives had maintained. The Commission on the Status of Women should take decisive measures to help the women in the dependent Territories to participate in the political and public life of their country, and to that end, it must help them to achieve political, economic and social equality with men.

In its report of 14 December 1951 (T/946) the Visiting Mission to Tanganyika had stated that most of the drudgery of African rural life and of African agriculture was borne by women who occupied a subordinate place in tribal society, were generally barred from traditional political activity and offices, and had few educational opportunities. The United Nations report on the World Social Situation confirmed the generally gloomy picture of the dependent Territories.

In her own country, on the other hand, as in all the Soviet Socialist Republics and the USSR as a whole, women enjoyed equal rights with men and participated fully in all aspects of national life. The number of women in the various branches of government was constantly growing thanks to the determined action the Soviet Government had taken from its very inception to give them full equality. The experience of Soviet women showed that education, though important, was not enough to improve the status of women who must be guaranteed equal rights with men. The Byelorussian delegation would support any proposal designed to achieve such equality.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France), in reply to the Byelorussian representative, said that under an Act promulgated by the French Parliament in 1951, all inhabitants of the Territory who could read French or Arabic were entitled to vote. It was therefore incorrect to say that a woman who could read and write could not vote unless she had two children. It was surprising that the representative of the Union des Populations du Cameroun should have made such a mistake, which had been repeated by the Byelorussian representative. The provision allowing mothers of two children to vote had been adopted as a compromise. It was designed to extend the right to vote to some of the illiterate population and had supplemented an earlier proposal to that end which would have favoured men. The electorate of the Cameroons which had numbered 15,000 in 1946, had increased to 520,000 after the Act of 1951 had been promulgated,

and at present comprised 580,000 persons. As could be seen from those figures, progress had been rapid, and while the existing voting system was not perfect, it was the best possible in the circumstances and would be improved as soon as the organization of vital statistics permitted.

Mrs. WARDE (United Kingdom) said that her Government had a special interest in the matter before the Commission. The Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly had acted upon the resolution on the political rights of women in the Trust Territories which the Commission had unanimously adopted at its preceding session (E/2401, paragraph 50). Her Government felt strongly that the difficulties under discussion were not confined to the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories but were also to be found in certain sovereign States. That contention was borne out by the report on women's franchise rights (A/2426) submitted to the eighth session of the General Assembly. There were many problems yet to be solved in respect of the political rights of women and she would welcome any constructive proposals for their solution, provided that the Commission rejected the thesis that such problems were peculiar to dependent Territories. It should also be observed that the women of certain Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories were in a more favourable position than the women of many sovereign States.

The documents now before the Commission were only supplementary reports. They should be read in conjunction with previous reports on the political rights of women which showed that steady progress was being made. Much valuable information, particularly in regard to the situation in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, was to be found in the records of the Trusteeship Council and of the special Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories. That information could assist the Commission in forming a general impression of the progress made throughout the world in granting political rights to women. It should not, however, be discussed in detail by the Commission but rather by the Trusteeship Council and the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories.

Mrs. MITROVIC (Yugoslavia) observed that the information submitted to the Commission was far from complete although the Secretary-General had done his best with the material at his disposal.

Article 73 e of the Charter made no provision for the transmission of information on political conditions in the Non-Self-Governing Territories, an omission which explained but did not justify the dearth of information on the situation in the Trust Territories. She wondered whether further efforts should not be made to obtain more detailed information from the governments concerned particularly as the General Assembly had adopted resolution 752 (VIII) inviting the Administering Authorities to submit information on political conditions in the Territories under their jurisdiction. Perhaps the Commission might go even further and request the States concerned to submit all information that might be of use in its work. It would also be useful for the Commission to have summaries describing the status of women in the Trust Territories, the relevant measures recommended by the Trusteeship Council and the General Assembly to improve their status and the action taken to give effect to those recommendations. That information would enable the Commission to tackle the most urgent problems forthwith.

The position of women in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories was largely due to the fact that they were subjected to discrimination on the grounds of race and sex. In accordance with its previous resolutions on the subject, the Commission might recommend concrete measures to remedy those conditions. The question should be discussed in detail.

The CHAIRMAN proposed that the Commission should take note of the reports submitted by the Secretary-General on the status of women in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories (E/CN.6/235 and 237).

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN said that, if there were no objections, the resolutions on the nationality of married women submitted by the United States of America (E/CN.6/L.120) and by Cuba (E/CN.6/L.119) together with the United Kingdom amendments (E/CN.6/L.123) would be referred to the Committee on Resolutions.

It was so decided.

In reply to questions by Mrs. HAHN (United States of America), Mrs. TABET (Lebanon), and Begum AHMED (Pakistan), Mrs. TENISON-WOODS (Secretariat) gave some preliminary figures on the distribution and sales of the pamphlets "The Road to Equality: Political Rights of Women", and "Political Education of Women" and said that a member of the Publications Board would attend a later meeting and give final figures.

Miss MAÑAS (Cuba) thought that, considering the large Spanish-speaking population of Latin America, the Spanish edition was much too small. A further 800 copies would not be sufficient to ensure adequate distribution.

Mrs. TENISON-WOODS (Secretariat) drew attention to the financial implications of the publication of such pamphlets.

Miss MAÑAS (Cuba) thought that the Commission should decide the minimum number of copies to be issued in Spanish.

The CHAIRMAN, speaking as the representative of the Dominican Republic, suggested that the Spanish edition of the pamphlet should be increased to approximately 2,500.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.