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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Eighth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SIXTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 26 March 1954, at 11 a.m.

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including information on Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories
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PRESENT:

Chairman:

Miss BERNARDINO Dominican Republic

Rapporteur:

Mrs. FIROUZ Iran

Members:

DAW NGWE KHIN Burma

Mrs. NOVIKOVA Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic

Miss MISTRAL 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

Also present:

Mrs. FLOURET Argentina

Mrs. de CALVO LEDON Inter-American Commission of Women

Representatives of specialized agencies:

Mrs. FIGUEROA International Labour Organisation

Mrs. CRUZ-SANTOS United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

PRESENT: (continued)

Representatives of non-governmental organizations:

Miss SENDER	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
Miss KAHN	World Federation of Trade Unions
Mrs. EREN)	World Federation of United Nations Associations
Mrs. FOX)	

Category B and Register:

Begum Nafusa HAMDANI	All-Pakistan Women's Association
Mrs. ROBERTS	Associated Country Women of the World Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations
Mrs. MAHON)	International Alliance of Women
Mrs. WOODSMALL)	
Miss FREEMAN)	International Council of Women
Mrs. REGISTER)	
Mrs. RANDALL	International Federation of Business and Professional Women
Miss LAGEMANN)	International Federation of Friends of Young Women
Miss ROBB)	
Miss SCHWARZENBACH)	
Miss RUIZ)	International Federation of Women Lawyers
Miss SMITH)	
Miss WOLLE-EGENOLF	International League for the Rights of Man
Miss EVANS)	Pan Pacific Women's Association
Miss SCHAIN)	
Mrs. RUSSELL	Women's International Democratic Federation
Miss SCHAEFER)	World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations
Miss WEBER)	
Miss FORSYTH	World's Young Women's Christian Association
<u>Secretariat:</u> Mrs. TENISON-WOODS	Chief of the Status of Women Section
Mrs. GRINBERG-VINAVER	Secretary of the Commission
Mr. WALLER	Secretary, Publications Board

POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN (E/CN.6/L.121/Rev.3 and L.124/Rev.1)

(concluded)

The CHAIRMAN invited the Commission to examine the two draft resolutions on the item, as adopted by the Resolutions Committee (E/CN.6/L.121/Rev.3 and E/CN.6/L.124/Rev.1).

Mrs. FOMINA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the development of education, though useful, was only one of many measures in the economic, social and political fields necessary to ensure women equal political rights with men. In spite of that objection, she might have supported the original draft (E/CN.6/L.121/Rev.1) but she could not support the new text now before the Commission (E/CN.6/L.121/Rev.3) since it was even more limited in scope, being addressed to non-governmental organizations, rather than to Member States which had the main responsibility in the matter. She would therefore abstain in the vote on the new text.

Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) and Mrs. DEMBINSKA (Poland) shared the USSR representative's view.

The CHAIRMAN put to the vote the draft resolution E/CN.6/L.121/Rev.3.
The draft resolution was adopted by 15 votes to none, with 3 abstentions.

Mr. WALLER (Secretary, Publications Board) explained that the total figures for the distribution of the pamphlet on political education of women were as follows: in English, of a total of 7,119 copies, 1,367 had been distributed officially free of charge, 2,500 had been sold, and 3,252 had been distributed through the services of the Department of Public Information. In French, of a total of 1,673 copies, 673 had been distributed officially free of charge, 500 had been sold, and 500 had been distributed through the services of the Department

of Public Information. In Spanish, of a total of 1,719 copies, 459 had been distributed officially free of charge, 250 had been sold, and 1,000 had been distributed through the services of the Department of Public Information. A few copies remained in stock in each language. A further Spanish edition was contemplated, a request for an additional 800 copies having been received.

All decisions of United Nations organs involving the publication of documents were notified to the United Nations Publications Board, a body responsible to the Secretary-General which decided on the policy to be followed with regard to those publications, in consultation with the services responsible for the sales, circulation and distribution of the publications as well as with the substantive department concerned. In its decisions, the Publications Board was bound by the resolutions of the General Assembly requiring the Secretary-General to exercise the utmost economy in the publication and distribution of documents.

There should be no difficulty in absorbing the possible cost of an additional edition of the Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2462); where the pamphlet was concerned, the Secretary-General would have to know how many copies the Commission wished to be distributed before he could estimate the financial implications involved.

In general, the Commission would facilitate the Secretary-General's task if it specified to what organizations and groups the documents in question were to be sent.

Mrs. de CALVO (Inter-American Commission of Women) noted, in that connexion, that the request for an additional edition of 800 copies in Spanish had been submitted by her Commission through the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States. Her Commission believed that the pamphlet could be very useful in the fight for women's rights, and it planned to request each year quantities of relevant material for distribution on the American continent.

The CHAIRMAN, speaking as the representative of a Spanish-speaking country, wondered whether it would not be possible to issue 2,000 copies of the pamphlet in Spanish, in view of the large number of Spanish-speaking countries and the vital importance of the problem.

Mr. WALLER (Secretary, Publications Board) replied in the affirmative.

In reply to a request by the Begum Anwar AHMED (Pakistan) that the pamphlet should be brought out in the languages of all Member States, he stated that the matter would have to be taken up with the relevant services of the Department of Public Information.

Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) asked that the third and fourth paragraphs of the draft resolution should be put to the vote separately, the fourth paragraph being voted on in parts, the first part to end with the words "Secretary-General's memorandum and".

The CHAIRMAN put to the vote the third paragraph of the draft resolution (E/CN.6/L.124/Rev.1).

The third paragraph was adopted by 14 votes to none, with 3 abstentions.

The first part of the fourth paragraph, ending with the words "the Secretary-General's memorandum and" was adopted by 14 votes to none, with 3 abstentions.

The second part of the fourth paragraph was adopted unanimously.

The draft resolution as a whole was adopted by 15 votes to none, with 3 abstentions.

EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK FOR MEN AND WOMEN WORKERS: PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK, INCLUDING INFORMATION ON TRUST AND NON-SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES (E/CN.6/231, 235, 237 and E/CN.6/L.125)

Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that the question of equal pay for equal work for men and women workers had been discussed repeatedly in various United Nations organs. In fact, one of the primary tasks of the Commission under its terms of reference was the making of recommendations for the elimination of discrimination against women in economic and social fields, particularly in regard to remuneration. Although the Commission had early determined to work for those ends it had not yet achieved any tangible results and its efforts had been criticized repeatedly on that score.

Her delegation had said time and time again that the Commission had erred in deciding not to discuss the basic principle of equal pay for equal work on the ground that the International Labour Organisation was considering the matter. Her delegation's misgivings had been well-founded for the International Labour Organisation, after many years study, had produced a Convention on Equal Remuneration of Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value which contained no provisions that were binding on the parties and no time limit for its implementation. In accordance with article 7, parties to the Convention could limit the application of its principles to certain parts of their territories. The Convention made no reference to the question of Non-Self-Governing Territories where women workers were in an inferior position, to the protection of either men or women workers, to special maternity benefits, to social security or to special provisions for mother and child care. Because of such omissions the ILO Convention did not satisfy those who sincerely desired to give effect to the basic principle. Moreover, only six States had signed the Convention, inadequate though it was, and therefore, the Commission must make recommendations which would promote the speedy application of the principle.

That discrimination in respect of women prevailed was demonstrated by the Secretary-General's memorandum. Moreover, the Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor had published a report in 1953 describing the discrimination to which women workers in the United States were subject, particularly in regard to wages. The Bureau stated that on the average women workers received 40 per cent less remuneration than men for the same work. Reports in the United States press bore out those statements. Only thirteen states in the United States had enacted special legislation establishing the principle of equal pay for equal work. Of seven bills on the subject submitted to the United States Congress in 1953 not one had been passed. She endorsed the United States representative's statement that the situation was detrimental to men and women workers alike.

There was no doubt that the monopolies derived huge profits from the exploitation of women workers. It had been said that if all women workers in the United States were given equal pay with men, employers would be compelled to pay an additional ten billion dollars each year in wages. In Italy the principle of equal pay for equal work was proclaimed in the Constitution but surveys by Italian trade union organizations showed that, in practice, women's salaries ranged from 18 to 30 per cent lower than men's wages. In Japan, women's wages amounted to approximately 43.7 per cent of the average wages for men and the situation in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories was even worse for women in those countries were subject to discrimination on the basis not only of sex but also of race. The reports of the 1953 session of the World Congress of Women showed that in the Cameroons the wages of white women were ten times higher than the wages paid to indigenous women. The discrimination was allegedly the result of economic and financial circumstances.

In many countries the economic situation of women workers was aggravated by the expenditure of huge sums for non-productive purposes; growing unemployment had added to their difficulties, since, as women workers were usually employed in less skilled work they were generally the first to be dismissed. In the United States with over 5 million persons currently out of work, unemployment among women was reported to exceed 670,000 and a closer review of the facts

would probably show an even higher figure. Women workers did not receive the special assistance they needed and were not on a par with men in respect of social security rights. While, as the United States representative had said, in certain parts of that country legislation for equal pay for equal work had been enacted or was pending, in other states women workers were in a very difficult position.

In the USSR and the Byelorussian SSR, however, women enjoyed full equality with men. The principle of equal economic, political and social rights for all had been proclaimed by Soviet legislation from the very beginning. The Soviet and Byelorussian Constitutions gave full effect to the principle through guarantees to all citizens of the right to work, paid leave, social security, education, government protection of mothers and children and state subsidies to mothers of large families. Women were thus enabled to participate actively on a footing of full equality in all aspects of the national life. Over 50 per cent of Byelorussian industrial workers were women; the number of women in the needlework and textile industries was expanding and increased mechanization coupled with improved safety devices and greater educational facilities had opened up fresh employment opportunities for women. Women occupied 51 per cent of the posts in the Byelorussian civil service, and the ministries and in some branches of the Government they far outnumbered men. In addition over 80 per cent of the staff of the public health service and over 50 per cent of the persons attending school were women. The principle of equal pay for equal work was strictly observed.

As conditions for women workers were not satisfactory in all parts of the world, women looked to the Commission to take action to better their lot. It could no longer postpone the drafting of recommendations which would eliminate discrimination against women workers and governments must take the necessary legislative and other measures to give effect to the principle of equal pay for equal work. Accordingly her delegation was submitting a draft resolution on the subject (E/CN.6/L.125) for the Commission's consideration. She drew particular attention to paragraph 1 of the operative part which emphasized the need for

legislative and other action and to paragraph 2 which called upon all States, both Members and non-members of the United Nations to encourage the activities of governmental and non-governmental organizations in the field. The documentation submitted to the Commission on the activities of the non-governmental organizations testified to the value of their work in the field and the Commission should make use of their services.

Lastly, she said that the substance of the Byelorussian draft resolution should meet the desires of all women workers and help to ensure the full implementation of the principle of equal pay for equal work.

Miss MISTRAL (Chile) said that although considerable progress had been made in recent years throughout South America in ensuring to women greater economic equality with men, the women of that continent were still demanding implementation of the principle of equal pay for equal work. In the country, that inequality was most evident, and, while general economic progress in the cities had reduced the necessity for women to work, economic abuse of women workers persisted. It was essentially a political, not a moral phenomenon, as was evident in Chile and other South American countries where the pay of women workers had doubled since the inception of more democratic regimes, and as a result of general political progress and the growing participation of women in political life. Nevertheless, it was still common for women in some countries of South America and Asia to receive half the pay of men for working the same hours at jobs requiring the same skills. Everything possible must be done to correct that inequality.

An equally urgent related problem in South America was the provision of child care centres and nurseries for children of working mothers. The many that now existed, even in small cities, constituted a relatively recent development, and it was urgent to extend them to towns and suburbs if the children of working women were to be saved from the corruption of life in the streets. Such centres should be subsidized by the State, with parents contributing no more than one-third of the cost of maintaining them. They would prove especially vital in improving the

lot of the poorer classes, which generally had the largest families, and of the children of immigrant families who generally had some difficulty in adapting to the new environment. There was a special urgency for greater attention to child welfare in South American countries where the population was predominantly Indian. Finally, provision for care of the children would enable parents, particularly illiterate adults, to attend the night schools which had been established in some South American countries largely through municipal subsidies. Many more such schools should be opened; at present they were usually situated in or near the large cities.

It should be borne in mind that, in the last analysis, the struggle of women for equal pay for equal work and for proper care of their children could only be won as a result of an increased social awareness of the urgency of those problems. Teachers and religious leaders should exert every effort to create that social consciousness together with a general recognition that the protection of children was the duty of the State as well as of the parents.

Miss KAHN (World Federation of Trade Unions), before addressing herself to the question of equal pay for women workers, thanked the Chairman for her efforts on behalf of the two representatives of the WFTU still awaiting visas which would enable them to attend the Commission's session, and pointed out that if those visas were not granted, the WFTU could not be represented at all of the remaining meetings.

The WFTU greatly appreciated the constructive work accomplished by the Commission in promoting political equality for women, but warned that those gains would remain meaningless unless commensurate progress could be made in winning economic equality for women. The Commission must recognize the vital importance of equal pay as a first step towards such economic equality and its failure, thus far, despite past resolutions on the subject, to achieve full implementation of that principle. As the United States representative had stated and as WFTU had advocated in its original submission of that item to the Council in 1948, the rate of pay for women workers should be the rate for the job, not for the sex, and it was with that understanding of the nature of the problem that the Commission should re-examine its approach to a solution. The fight

for economic rights for women presented even greater difficulties than the campaign for their political rights, for the latter represented long-term gains affecting the entire political life of a country, while the achievement of equal pay as a primary economic right would mean an immediate gain for women involving immediate expenditure by governments and more particularly by private enterprises. Member Governments differed widely in their objections to equal pay for women: some invoked philosophical considerations, others resisted it for economic reasons, while still others offered numerous rationalizations to justify their failure to implement the principle.

The protection of women workers by assuring them equal pay for equal work took on a new and greater importance as an immediate, not a long-term objective, owing to prevailing economic circumstances. Even in normally stable economic conditions, women workers were subjected to special discrimination and exploitation: their employment was more precarious than that of men; they were used by employers to foster competition with men workers whose own employment conditions were depressed because they could be replaced by women working for lower pay; they were placed in lower-paid jobs even when they possessed the same skills as men, thus threatening general wage stability and undermining employment conditions for all workers. When economic levels began to recede - and various United Nations studies indicated that such was the prevailing circumstance - women workers were the first to experience the impact of unemployment. The Commission should recognize that danger and attempt to prevent the loss of past gains by relating the fight for equal pay to its proper economic and social context.

At its current session, the Commission was, perhaps for the first time since the end of the war, faced with the prospect of economic recession in the Western world (the ECE had warned of the impact of recession in the United States on European economies, and unemployment in the United States had been officially estimated at approximately 4 millions). It had to go beyond a routine campaign aimed at prohibiting and preventing discrimination against women workers on grounds of sex, eliminating adverse competition between men and women workers, and establishing a basis of equality for the wage structure; it had to envisage the prospect that women would be the first victims of unemployment because they were treated as a minority despite their numbers and because a greater proportion of

women than men were classified as unskilled workers. Accordingly, the Commission should work towards effective measures to achieve implementation of the principle of equal pay as a matter of urgency, particularly in the form of national legislation.

It should not be content with constitutional provisions or expressions of governments' good intentions. In Italy, for example, equal pay for women was provided in the Constitution, but in many places there was still a disparity as high as 30 per cent between wages of men and women; while in Great Britain, some 6,000 women had recently presented 1,360,000 signatures on petitions to Parliament asking implementation of the equal pay principle, which had not been applied although it had been accepted in principle by the government since 1920. Official United States sources, moreover, indicated that even where states had laws providing equal pay, coverage was limited and legal weaknesses prevented full enforcement.

The ILO Convention providing equal pay for women workers could not be depended upon for full implementation of the principle. Although there were now eight States which had ratified it, many others had reservations and any deterioration in the general economic situation would inevitably increase governments' caution.

The Commission should, in the circumstances, launch a campaign for equal pay for women as a moral right and an economic necessity, and it should initiate that campaign by calling upon governments to adopt adequate national legislation establishing irreducible minimum standards. At the same time, it should work through governments and non-governmental organizations to explain the need for urgent action to protect women workers. While it was true that the United Nations could not oblige governments to enact laws, it could recommend equal pay provisions as urgent measures required to maintain high economic levels in industrialized countries and to raise economic standards in under-developed areas. The United Nations, prodded by the Commission, should emerge as the leading advocate of economic equality; it should undertake that task in the same crusading spirit which had characterized its fight for political rights for women. Economic discrimination against women was a widespread and vicious phenomenon; it should be corrected immediately. Equal pay for equal work would have a beneficial effect on the entire economy.