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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Tenth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND TENTH MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 15 March 1956, at 10.30 a.m.

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Present:

Chairman: Mrs. RÖSSEL (Sweden)

Members:

Mrs. CORREA MORALES de APARICIO	Argentina
Miss GIBSON	Australia
Mrs. CISELET	Belgium
Mrs. NOVIKOVA	Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
Mrs. CHU	China
Miss MAÑAS	Cuba
Miss BERNARDINO	Dominican Republic
Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX	France
Mrs. ROESAD	Indonesia
Mrs. BEN-ZVI	Israel
Begum ANWAR AHMED	Pakistan
Mrs. DZIMBINSKA	Poland
Mr. GIRON	Sweden
Mrs. SPIRIDONOVA	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Mr. WARDROP	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Mrs. HAHN	United States of America
Mrs. SANCHEZ de URDANETA	Venezuela
Mrs. MITROVIC	Yugoslavia

Observers for Governments of States Members of the United Nations:

Mr. SARAIVA GUERREIRO	Brazil
Mr. STOYANOV	Bulgaria
Mr. STRNAD	Czechoslovakia
Miss LUNSINGH-MEIJER	Netherlands

Representatives of specialized agencies:

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

Representatives of non-governmental organizations:Category A

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions	Mrs. EKENDAHL
International Federation of Christian Trade Unions	Miss NAGELS Mrs. SCHMIDT
International Organization of Employers	Mrs. VANEK
World Federation of United Nations Associations	Mrs. TROUPIN

Category B

Catholic International Union for Social Service	Miss BOSMANS Miss HERTOEGHE Miss de ROMER
International Alliance of Women	Miss CAMPOAMOR Mrs. CHOISY-NECKER
International Federation of Business and Professional Women	Miss TOMLINSON
International Federation of University Women	Mrs. FIECHTER
International Federation of Women Lawyers	Lady CHATTERJEE Miss MANFREDINI
International League for the Rights of Man	Mrs. WOLLE-EGENOLF
Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations	Miss van EEGHEN Mrs. HYMER
Pan-Pacific Women's Association	Mrs. HYMER
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom	Mrs. BAER
World Federation of Catholic Young Women and Girls	Miss FARQUET
World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations	Miss de LUCY-FOSSARIEU Miss de ROMER
Young Christian Workers	Miss PEZZULLO

Register:

Open Door International	Mrs. BAER
St. Joan's International Social and Political Alliance	Miss CHALLONER Mrs. LEROY-BOY
World Federation of Democratic Youth	Mrs. MOLKOVA

Secretariat:

Mrs. Tenison-Woods	Representative of the Secretary-General
Mrs. Grinberg-Vinaver	Secretary to the Commission

1. REPORTS OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN TO THE ELEVENTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, THE TENTH SESSION OF THE SOCIAL COMMISSION AND THE EIGHTH SESSION OF THE SUB-COMMISSION ON PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION OF MINORITIES (item 6 of the agenda)

The CHAIRMAN invited Mrs. Lefaucheux, who had represented the Commission at the eleventh session of the Commission on Human Rights, to present her report.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) said that collaboration between the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women was essential. It was as a result of such collaboration that article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had been mentioned in the draft covenant on civil and political rights. The Commission on Human Rights had adopted a resolution inviting the Commission on the Status of Women to send a representative to participate regularly in its sessions. That decision by the Commission on Human Rights had been endorsed by the General Assembly.

The agenda of the eleventh session of the Commission on Human Rights was only of indirect interest to the Commission on the Status of Women. It should be noted, however, that the Commission on Human Rights had expressed the hope that the Commission on the Status of Women, the Specialized Agencies and the non-governmental organizations concerned would continue to co-operate with the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. In another resolution, the Commission on Human Rights had invited the Secretary-General to report to it, and to the Commission on the Status of Women, on technical assistance measures. Those decisions were of importance for the future work of the Commission on the Status of Women. Every Commission of the United Nations must, of course, be careful not to poach on the preserves of other bodies as that would create confusion and jeopardize the authority of the United Nations. But co-operation would be both logical and desirable. Hence it was particularly unfortunate that in 1956 the Commission on Human Rights should be meeting in New York at the same time as the Commission on the Status of Women was holding its session at Geneva.

Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) agreed that it was most regrettable that the Commission on the Status of Women could not send a representative to the session of the Commission on Human Rights owing to the fact that the two Commissions were meeting simultaneously.

The Commission took note of Mrs. Lefaucheux's report with appreciation for the services she had rendered.

The CHAIRMAN then invited Miss Bernardino, who had represented the Commission at the tenth session of the Social Commission, to make her report.

Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) recalled that, at the ninth session, the Polish representative had formally proposed the addition to the Commission's agenda of the question of the protection of mother and child. Various views had been expressed. Certain members of the Commission had maintained that it was contradictory to claim the right both to protection and to equality for women; others had urged that the question was a matter solely within the purview of the Social Commission. The Commission had then asked the representative of the Secretary-General and the Director of the Bureau of Social Affairs to state their views on the question. The latter had said that all questions relating to the protection of mother and child were closely linked to the programme of the Social Commission. The Commission had thereupon decided to request the Economic and Social Council to authorize the Social Commission to invite a representative of the Commission on the Status of Women to attend its proceedings, without voting rights, whenever questions of direct interest to that Commission were discussed. A representative of the Commission on the Status of Women had accordingly attended the tenth session of the Social Commission, and had urged it to assume responsibility for a study on questions relating to the protection of mother and child, with special reference to the protection of working mothers; but no decision had been taken on the subject. Subsequently, under its resolution 590B (XX), the Economic and Social Council had decided to postpone the Social Commission's programme on those questions indefinitely. It would thus appear that the members of the Social Commission did not intend to undertake the study proposed by the Polish representative, so that it lay with the Commission on the Status of Women to decide at its present session what action was to be taken on the proposal.

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America) said that in the light of Miss Bernardino's report she proposed the inclusion of a new item on the agenda, to become item 7(f), with the title "Working women with family responsibilities, including working mothers, and means for the improvement of their position". After consulting many members she believed that that wording represented the greatest common measure of agreement; in order to meet the views of certain delegations she had inserted the words "including working mothers" despite the fact that that category was already covered in the opening phrase.

Under such an item, the Commission would have to consider in broad terms the position of all working women, whether single or married, whether mothers or not. The emphasis would not be on working mothers, although they would form part of the inquiry. She hoped the Commission would consider women's economic and family responsibilities in their various aspects, including the extent to which employed women, both married and single, contributed to the support of others, the number and age of their dependents, the amount of work women with outside jobs performed in the home, the services and facilities available to assist them in carrying out their household tasks, the hours worked by women in outside employment and in the home, and, finally, the arrangements made by employers to adjust working hours to family needs.

In the United States of America, women with young children did not usually take outside work, because they felt their primary duty lay in the home looking after their children. In 1953, one quarter of all married women had been working outside their homes: among those with children under six only 15 per cent had been employed, whereas among those with no children under 18 years of age one third had been employed. Generally speaking, women took paid employment for a few years after marriage, and then gave it up until the children reached school age. The average age of employed women was 39 years. The most common age for marriage was just over twenty, and most women bore their children within the first few years of marriage. Consequently, wives who again took up employment after the age of 35 or more did not have young children in their care.

Mrs. SANCHEZ de URDANETA (Venezuela) supported the United States proposal, but considered that the words "including working mothers" were redundant and should be deleted from the title of the item.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) shared the view of the Venezuelan representative. It seemed obvious to her that the term "working women" included working mothers.

Mrs. CISELET (Belgium) also agreed with the Venezuelan representative.

Mrs. SPIRIDONOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) preferred the wording "The Position of working mothers and other working women with family responsibilities, and means for its improvement" on which she believed agreement had been reached at the 205th meeting,^{1/} because it was wider in scope and posed the problem in a realistic way.

^{1/} See E/CN.6/SR.205.

In the Soviet Union it was possible for women to take part in the political and cultural life of the country because of the existence of numerous nursery schools, kindergartens, etc. and because of the various social and health benefits, such as special allowances for women with large families and unmarried mothers. During the sixth Five-Year Plan measures would be introduced to extend such benefits and to increase the number of institutions for small children. Women were thus increasingly able to devote more attention to their families, but something still remained to be done. She thus felt that the item should be more broadly conceived so that the Commission could effectively improve the position of working women throughout the world.

The CHAIRMAN asked whether the Soviet Union representative wished to make a formal proposal as to the wording of the proposed new item.

Mrs. SPIRIDONOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) replying in the affirmative, said the Commission should adopt the wording already agreed upon.

Mrs. DEMBINSKA (Poland) was still not clear as to what precisely would be discussed under the proposed new item. Generally speaking, in those countries where they had equal rights and duties, family responsibilities were borne by both spouses. She wondered whether the United States representative had in mind only those cases where the whole responsibility, whether for parents, younger brothers and sisters or children, fell on the woman.

Clearly the Commission, engaged as it was in the fight to obtain equal rights for women, must consider the position of those who, because of their family responsibilities and the paramount claims of children upon their time and attention, were unable to take a full part in the political life of their country. The problem for such women was how to combine civic with family obligations. Unfortunately, the United States proposal threw no light on the approach to such problems. She for her part believed that the item should be worded in such a way as to give pride of place to the problems of working mothers.

Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) was glad that the Commission was intending to discuss the important problem of the protection of mothers and working women, but it was essential to define the scope of the inquiry; the way in which the question had been posed by the United States representative was unduly restrictive. The Soviet Union representative was quite right in arguing that the phraseology agreed upon at the 205th meeting was both clearer and more comprehensive.

Mrs. BEN-ZVI (Israel) considered that the expression "working women with family responsibilities" covered all working women, whether married or not. She could therefore agree to the wording proposed by the United States representative. On the other hand, she felt that if the title of the item were prefaced by reference to mothers, the meaning of the expression "working women" would be unjustifiably restricted.

Mrs. CHU (China) said that as women in her country were engaged in industry, agriculture and handicrafts, the problems facing working women had come very much to the fore. She favoured the United States wording which seemed broad enough to cover all the categories involved.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) said that, while she did not wish to enumerate the many social institutions for maternal and child welfare in her country, she would like to draw the Commission's attention to certain types of family allowance which could constitute nothing less than a bonus to women who did not work. She would like the Commission to go thoroughly into all the implications of the question.

Begum ANWAR AHMED (Pakistan) agreed with the Polish representative that before taking a decision members must be quite clear as to what questions they proposed to discuss. It had been her impression during past sessions that under the item of the protection of mother and child the intention was to discuss woman's threefold function of mother, housewife and breadwinner, and to establish what kind of measures, legislative or administrative, might make for greater security and an easier life. If that were indeed the purpose in mind there was no need to make special mention of working mothers in the title of the item.

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America) said that the way in which she had worded her proposal provided evidence of her delegation's interest in examining the position of working mothers, but in the light of the objections expressed by the representatives of Venezuela, France, Belgium and Pakistan, she would ask for her proposal to be put to the vote in parts and would abstain from voting on the words "including working mothers".

Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) said that, although the words "including working mothers" were unnecessary, she would vote in favour of the United States proposal and hoped that, in a spirit of conciliation, the Venezuelan representative would withdraw her objection.

Before the Commission took its final decision it would be of interest to hear the comments of the representative of the International Labour Organisation.

Mrs. FIGUEROA (International Labour Organisation) agreed with the representative of Pakistan that the Commission should study women's three-fold role and the disabilities they suffered in the struggle for equal rights. Women would inevitably be at a disadvantage compared to men so long as they had duties over and above those imposed by their outside work, and their efforts to secure equal pay might well be frustrated thereby.

Experience showed that the lot of women with family responsibilities could be greatly eased by social insurance schemes or other benefits and services financed either from public or private sources or a combination of both. She would not, however, develop that theme at the present stage of the discussion.

Perhaps she might later be given an opportunity of describing what was being done at the international level.

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America) suggested that a vote be taken on her delegation's proposal.

Mrs. SPIRIDONOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) could not agree to the suggestion of the United States representative. The phrase "working women with family responsibilities" already included mothers, and the proposed formula was therefore tautological. On the other hand, the title proposed by the United States representative did not cover the cases of women working in agriculture, unemployed women or housewives.

She wished to stress the importance of including all mothers, whether working in industry and offices or not, and she would suggest the following formula: "The position of working women, and mothers with family responsibilities, and means for its improvement".

She would support the request of the representatives of Poland and Pakistan, among others, that time should be allowed for pondering the matter and discussing it in private, so that a wise approach might be adopted.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that the Commission was now discussing the matter for the second time, and time was running short. The United States representative had asked her to take a vote immediately, but the French and Soviet Union representatives had suggested that it be deferred. She would ask them whether they were making a formal proposal under rule 50 (3) of the Commission's rules of procedure.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) said that the last remarks of the Soviet Union representative showed that members of the Commission were not all speaking of the same problem. Mrs. Spiridonova had referred to women with family responsibilities who did not work, and it did seem that such cases were not covered by the United States title, which dealt with women with family responsibilities who worked. Without wishing to make a formal proposal, she would therefore suggest that the discussion be adjourned for a short time to enable members to reflect on the exact scope of the item to be placed on the agenda.

Mrs. SPIRIDONOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) indicated that she too had no wish formally to move the adjournment of the debate.

Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) suggested that the meeting should be suspended for a short time during which representatives might be able to reach agreement.

It was so agreed.

The meeting was suspended at 12 noon and was resumed at 12.15 p.m.

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America) said that, in an endeavour to meet the wishes of other delegations, she would submit her proposal in the following form:

"Working women, including working mothers, with family responsibilities, and means for the improvement of their position."

She further requested that, as provided for in rule 59 of the rules of procedure, the vote be taken in three parts, namely: first, on the words "Working women"; then on the words "including working mothers"; and finally, on the rest of the proposal.

Mrs. SPIRIDONOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) stated that, although she would have preferred a broader formula, her delegation was prepared to accept the United States proposal at the present stage.

Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) remarked that the problem raised by the representative of Venezuela persisted, but that her delegation would vote for the United States proposal in its entirety.

Mrs. SPIRIDONOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) suggested that it might be expedient to vote on the United States proposal as a whole, and not in parts.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that the United States representative had invoked rule 59 of the rules of procedure.

She then put the United States proposal to the vote.

The words "Working women" were adopted unanimously.

The words "including working mothers" were adopted by 9 votes to 4, with 5 abstentions.

The words "with family responsibilities, and means for the improvement of their position" were adopted unanimously.

The United States proposal for the inclusion of a new item on the agenda as item 7 (f), in the above form, was adopted unanimously.

The CHAIRMAN then invited the representative of the Dominican Republic to report on the eighth session of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) expressed her pleasure at the opportunity afforded to her to address the Commission as spokesman of the Sub-Commission. That body had several times stressed the importance of measures for abolishing discrimination on grounds of sex, and it had asked the Commission on the Status of Women to adopt a clear position and an appropriate resolution on the subject. She would ask members of the Commission to express their opinions on the draft report on discrimination in education drawn up by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Ammoun (E/CN.4/Sub.2/L.92) which was to be discussed at the Sub-Commission's next session.

The Commission took note of Miss Bernardino's two reports and expressed its appreciation of the services she had rendered.

The CHAIRMAN declared that the Commission had completed its discussion of item 6 of the agenda.

2. ACCESS OF WOMEN TO EDUCATION (item 4 of the agenda):

(a) Report on the access of women to education

The CHAIRMAN stated that no written report on higher education for women was available, but invited the representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to make a statement.

Miss SALAS (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) stated that many difficulties had been encountered in the preparation of the report on higher education for women called for by the Commission at its ninth session. It had therefore been decided to concentrate all efforts for the tenth session of the Commission on the report prepared by UNESCO jointly with the International Labour Organisation on opportunities for girls in vocational and technical education (E/CN.6/280). It was hoped to present a report on higher education to the Commission in 1958.

(b) Note transmitting the draft report of the Special Rapporteur on discrimination in the field of education, prepared for the eighth session of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (E/CN.6/277, E/CN.4/Sub.2/L.92)

Mrs. GRINBERG-VINAVER, Secretary to the Commission, stated that Mr. Ammoun had submitted a draft report on discrimination in education to the eighth session of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. At the same session, the Sub-Commission had adopted a resolution referring the draft report to the Commission on the Status of Women for examination of the section of the report (paragraphs 139 to 148) on discrimination based on sex. It had also invited Mr. Ammoun to continue with his work and to revise his report in the light of information, corrections and observations to be forwarded to him. The report was to be found in document E/CN.4/Sub.2/L.92.

A number of studies had also been undertaken at the national level and some of them had been circulated to members of the Commission. Unfortunately, they had not yet been issued in all the working languages, but that would be done very shortly.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.