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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Fourth session

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN THE
FIELD OF POLITICAL RIGHTS

(Report by the Secretary-General)

INTRODUCTION

1. At its third session, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted the following resolution:^{1/}

"The Commission on the Status of Women,

"Noting that the memorandum on the political rights of women (A/619, A/619/Corr.1, A/619/Add.1 and 2) circulated to the General Assembly in 1948, does not indicate whether women have equal political rights with men, in particular in regard to the right to vote and the right to be elected to public office in the seventy-four countries listed,

"Noting further that replies to the letter circulated to Member States by the Secretary-General on 17 May 1948 show only thirty-five countries where women enjoy the same political rights as men,

"Requests the Secretary-General to prepare a further report, based on information received from governments, and other relevant information, to show whether there is discrimination based on sex, in law or in practice, with respect to the right to vote and the right to be elected to public office in elections of all kinds."

PART I: SITUATION IN LAW

2. The memorandum on political rights of women (A/619) referred to in the resolution quoted above, which is to be brought up to date and circulated annually "to Members of the United Nations until all women throughout the world have the same political rights as men"^{2/} was revised and circulated to Member Governments as document A/1163 on 30 November 1949. This document, which is based on

1/ See document E/1316, paragraph 18, resolution 4.

2/ Resolution 120 (VI) of the Economic and Social Council.

/constitutional or
E/CN.6/131

constitutional or other legal provisions regulating women's right to vote and to be elected to public office, shows the extent to which women enjoy legal equality with men in this field as far as it has been possible for the Secretary-General to ascertain.

3. According to the information compiled in the above-mentioned document, women have equal legal rights with men in the political field, and consequently possess the right to vote and to be elected to public office on equal terms with men, in fifty-two countries. These are the following:

Albania, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burma, Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Canada, Ceylon, Chile, China, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador^{3/}, Finland, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Liberia, Luxembourg, Mongolian People's Republic, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Saarland, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Union of South Africa, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela and Yugoslavia.

4. Twenty-two countries have legislation which does not provide equality as between men and women in the field of political rights. They can be divided into the following groups:

(a) Countries where women have in law equal political rights with men, subject to the fulfilment of certain educational or property qualifications not required of men. In this group there are four countries:

<u>Guatemala:</u>	Women must be literate. Voting is compulsory and secret for literate men; optional and secret for women who have the required qualifications; and optional and public for illiterate men.
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<u>Portugal:</u>	Women are subject to higher educational requirements or, when fulfilling the same tax qualifications as those prescribed for men,
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^{3/} Voting is compulsory for men, voluntary for women.

must be heads of families in order to have the right to vote.

El Salvador:

Women must prove that they are 25 years of age and have passed the third school grade.

Syria:

Women must have an elementary school certificate, a condition not required for men.

(b) Countries where women have the right to vote and to be elected in municipal elections only. In the case of some of these countries, the right is subject to the fulfilment of certain qualifications not required of men. In this group there are five countries: Bolivia, Greece^{4/}, Mexico, Monaco and Peru^{5/}.

(c) Countries where by law women are not permitted to vote or to hold elective office. In this group, there are thirteen countries^{6/}: Colombia, Costa Rica, Egypt, Haiti, Honduras, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Nicaragua, and Switzerland.

PART II: SITUATION IN PRACTICE

5. The replies from Governments to the Questionnaire on the Legal Status and Treatment of Women^{7/} contain no material which establishes that women have been denied the right to vote and to be elected where they are not legally debarred from these rights. It does appear from information available to the Secretary-

4/ Until 1953, women are subject to higher age requirements: 25 years for women as against 21 years for men.

5/ Women are subject to higher age requirements: 21 years for women against 18 years for men.

6/ No elections are held in the following three countries: Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

7/ The following thirty-nine Governments have replied so far: Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Burma, Canada, Chile, China, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Greece, Guatemala, Iceland, India, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Siam, Sweden, Turkey, Union of South Africa, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela and Yugoslavia.

General that, in at least two countries^{8/}, women have in fact never voted or been elected to public office, although there are no laws denying such rights to women.

6. Ten Governments in their replies to the Questionnaire on the Legal Status and Treatment of Women gave data concerning the number of women in their legislative assemblies. Two of these Governments, those of Poland and Sweden, also commented on this subject as follows:

Poland: "The actual situation of women does not correspond yet fully with the legal position. The percentage of women holding office in legislative departments, in State and local governments is still low. There is however a considerable improvement as compared to the pre-war period."

Sweden: "As it will appear from the statistical data given ... the legal equality does not imply that women are actually holding public offices proportionally to the same extent as men."^{9/}

7. In Sweden women constitute 6.6 per cent of the Riksdag (legislative assembly). In Poland they constitute 7.5 per cent.

8. The same situation exists in most of the other countries. Only exceptionally does the percentage of women in any legislative assembly exceed ten, even though women in most cases total approximately 50 per cent of the electorate.

9. The following is a table showing the number and percentage of women in the legislative assemblies of various countries on which information is available to the Secretary-General. Members of the Commission will realize, however, that many factors other than possible discrimination against women are reflected in these statistics.

^{8/} These two countries are Afghanistan and Paraguay. Regarding Afghanistan, reference is made to document A/1163. Regarding Paraguay, reference is made to the report of the Inter-American Commission of Women to the Eighth International Conference of American States on the Political and Civil Rights of Women, page 73, and to Informe de la Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres a la Novena Conferencia Internacional Americana sobre Derechos Civiles y Politicos de la Mujer, pages 26 and 70.

^{9/} The reply continues:

"As to political activity of women in Sweden, the following figures may be quoted which show the proportion of men and women that voted in the general elections to the Second Chamber of the Riksdag in 1944:

74.8 per cent out of 2,111,989 men entitled to vote

69.2 per cent out of 2,198,252 women entitled to vote."

<u>Country</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of members of the legislative assemblies</u>	<u>Number of women</u>	<u>Percentage of women</u>
Australia	1950	112	5	4.5
Belgium	1949	369	13	3.5
Canada	1947	333	3	1
China	1947	1,691	84	5
Cuba	1949	190	6	3.2
Denmark	1947	225	20	9
Dominican Republic	1949	59	0	0
El Salvador	1949	42	0	0
Finland	1947	200	24	12
France	1949	939	51	5.4
Guatemala	1949	68	0	0
India	1950	328	11	3.3
Israel	1949	120	12	10
Japan	1949	716	23	3.2
New Zealand	1950	80	3	3.75
Norway	1950	150	6	4
Panama	1949	42	1	2.4
Philippines	1947	122	1	0.8
Poland	1947	442	33	7.5
Sweden	1947	380	25	6.6
Union of South Africa	1949	196	2	1
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	1948	1,339	277	20.7
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1950	625	20	3.2
United States of America Senate		96	1	1
House of Representatives		435	8	1.8
Uruguay	1947	129	4	3
Yugoslavia	1947	575	20	3.5
