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THIRD COMMITTEE  
25th meeting  
held on  
Tuesday, 21 October 1980  
at 10.30 a.m.

New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 25th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. GARVALOV (Bulgaria)

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24 October 1980  
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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 80: UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN: EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE  
(continued) (A/C.3/35/3/Add.19; A/35/286; A/C.3/35/7)

- (a) WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN (A/CONF.94/35; A/35/220)
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AGENDA ITEM 83: STATUS OF THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (continued) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/35/428)

1. Mr. LIGAIRI (Fiji) said that when assessing the progress made in the implementation of the Plan of Action and Programme for the first half of the Decade, the Copenhagen Conference had found that insufficient progress had been made in improving the status of women. Tremendous efforts would therefore be required during the next five years to implement the Programme adopted at Copenhagen. The recommendations it contained for Governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals on ways to improve the situation of women throughout the world would be meaningless unless action was taken on several fronts, giving high priority to improving the lot of the most disadvantaged women, particularly the rural and urban poor, with special emphasis on employment, health, education, food and child care, migrant women, prostitution, and women who had sole responsibility for their families.
2. After the Mexico City Conference of 1975, his Government had not embarked on any specific programme for women because the necessary funds had been lacking. However, it had come near to meeting the 14 minimum objectives of the Mexico City Plan of Action, with assistance from the Fiji National Council of Women and affiliated organizations such as the YWCA, the Pan Pacific South East Asia Women's Association (PPSEAWA), Stri Sewa Sabha, the Fiji Nurses Association, the Fiji Girl Guides Association, Soqosoqo Vakamarama and many other religious and charitable organizations throughout Fiji.
3. To illustrate what could be accomplished by a small developing country such as Fiji, which had meagre resources and could not strictly implement the recommendations or undertake the programmes envisaged in the Plan of Action, he gave a brief overview of the activities which had enabled Fiji to attain nearly all the objectives of the Mexico City Plan of Action during the first half of the Decade. Its fulfilment of the objectives through the implementation of programmes suited to its environment and people could be a valuable lesson for other countries.

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(Mr. Ligairi, Fiji)

4. In the field of education, 10 years of primary and secondary education was provided for every child regardless of sex. For those who wished to continue their education, there were scholarships and interest-free loans and the same opportunities were open to young people of both sexes. In adult education, the women's interest section of the Ministry of Fijian Affairs and Rural Development and the Ministry of Health ran courses in rural areas on nutrition, family planning, health and hygiene, handicrafts and budgeting. The YWCA ran similar courses in the urban areas.

5. In the field of health care, each health centre (including nursing stations) catered for a population of 3,000 to 5,000. Fiji maintained, in all, 4 divisional hospitals, 14 subdivisional hospitals, 4 area hospitals, 46 health centres, 89 nursing stations, and about 61 nursing zones in which doctors, sisters, public health nurses and paramedics provided maternal and child health services. Maternity services were complemented by family planning services and there were plans to develop and emphasize the interrelationship between those services at all maternity hospitals, wards and clinics. That would be done by improving on the present 90 per cent attendance rates at ante-natal and post-natal clinics and by working towards 100 per cent coverage of deliveries by medically trained staff. In that area, the Government had taken the WHO recommendations on maternal and child health care as its guidelines.

6. Women were actively involved in planning and implementation at the national, divisional and subdivisional and grass roots levels for the Government was aware of the fact that the health, nutrition and social well-being of Fiji women could best be served by having them participate fully in the policy- and decision-making process.

7. With regard to the rights and freedoms of the individual, the Fiji Constitution guaranteed equality for women, including their right to vote and to stand for elected office. Fiji had a few women members of Parliament.

8. While his Government was convinced that those of Fiji's problems which were caused by international factors could be overcome, it was greatly concerned with other outside factors affecting the lives and well-being of the people. For many years, the Government had been protesting against the testing of nuclear devices in the Pacific Ocean area. As the head of his delegation had stated at the Copenhagen Conference, the neutron bomb had just been added to the arsenal of nuclear devices being tested in the region.

9. The disregard for its environment completely negated the efforts which Fiji was making to improve the health and living conditions of its people, particularly its women and children. The representative of Fiji at the Conference had expressed the hope that the fears of the small developing nations for their future well-being would be taken into account and, in particular, that the Powers involved would recognize the consequences nuclear testing in the South Pacific had for the people of Fiji. The latter had been heartened by the call for global disarmament and the cessation of all nuclear testing made at the Conference by 500,000 women and *children of the Nordic countries*; it was reassuring to find that they shared a

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(Mr. Ligairi, Fiji)

common cause, so vital to the future of mankind, with the people of countries thousands of miles away.

10. After welcoming the two new Member States, Zimbabwe and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and greeting the new Republic of Vanuatu, he noted, referring to the problem of refugees, that half of the more than 15 million people who had fled their homes in recent years because of wars, civil disturbances, persecution or hostile government policies were women and children. His delegation looked forward to the day when all peoples could live peacefully and productively in their own countries.

11. Finally, he noted that his country was currently studying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was designed to ensure equal rights for all women, with a view to ratifying it. He urged Member States to safeguard women's professional and family rights and to ensure their participation on an equal footing in the political, economic and social life of their countries.

12. Mr. HAMOUD (Iraq) said that, in his country's view, the improvement of the status of women was a humanitarian question and an integral part of national policy. Iraq was aware of the role that women could play in society and in social and economic development, and it had taken various steps to promote the liberation and education of women.

13. In the sphere of legislation, it had enacted laws to guarantee women equal opportunities in employment while enabling them to raise a family. In so far as social security was concerned, women were entitled to maternity leave and were guaranteed all the rights enjoyed by workers, including the right to a pension.

14. With regard to the situation of rural women, two basic programmes covering the five years 1974-1979 had been launched. One was a large-scale literacy campaign and, since the adoption of the Act of 22 March 1978, every citizen aged between 15 and 45 was required to enrol in literacy centres or face a penalty. The campaign did not concentrate only on reading and writing but was also intended to provide a certain degree of education so that every citizen taking the course could benefit from the advantages envisaged by the State. The literacy course could take up to 36 months and so far 1,468,460 women had enrolled.

15. The other programme was designed to make primary education compulsory for all children aged between 6 and 10 regardless of sex. Because of anachronistic traditions, Iraqi women had not had access to education and, despite the efforts which had been made, the percentage of women and girls enrolled in educational institutions in the 1979-1980 academic year was not yet as high as had been hoped. In kindergarten the percentage was 48 per cent, in primary schools 45 per cent and in secondary schools and higher education establishments 31 per cent.

16. Since 1973, Iraq had made a special effort to improve the situation of women. Given its impact on the education of children and of society in general, women's cultural, social and economic backwardness was one of the major problems impeding change in Iraqi society; the emancipation of Iraqi women must therefore be pursued within the framework of the political, economic and cultural transformation of society.

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(Mr. Hamoud, Iraq)

17. Following the adoption of a programme of action the status of women was now perceived differently in Iraqi society. Thanks to that programme, Iraqi women could participate on an equal footing with men in every aspect of national life, and could join the armed forces or the civil service. The General Union of Iraqi Women was playing an important role in the elimination of the impediments to women's emancipation. The Union's sections throughout the country comprised a political apparatus able to mobilize public opinion, and bring about an awareness of the importance of the question both in the Arab countries and internationally.

18. Referring to the status of Iraqi women in occupied Palestine, whose most fundamental rights were violated by the Israeli authorities, he said that their status could not be dissociated from that of the Palestinian people in general. The international community should condemn such racist practices and proclaim its solidarity with the Palestinian people - Palestinian women in particular - and assist them in every sphere. The Palestinian women's fight was also that of the southern African women and should impel the international community to assist them, in particular by condemning all racist régimes.

19. He thanked Denmark for having provided the venue for the United Nations Conference, which represented a landmark in improving the status of women. The Programme of Action for the second half of the Decade reflected the commitment made by all countries.

20. Mrs. WYNTER (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) recalled resolution 16.1 adopted by UNESCO's General Conference at its nineteenth session, which had invited the Director-General to present at future sessions, through 1976, a special report describing progress made by UNESCO in attaining the goals for the Decade for Women in its areas of competence.

21. The document presented in compliance with those directives (21 C/16) described in detail the relevant activities of UNESCO during the 1978-1980 biennium. They were arranged under three main headings corresponding to the objectives both of UNESCO's programme and of the Decade: promotion of equality between women and men, participation of women in development, and the role of women in the strengthening of world peace.

22. The report revealed that the biennium under consideration had been marked by an over-all increase in activities relating to the promotion of women, by improved intersectoral co-ordination within UNESCO's programme for women and by more active participation by UNESCO in all the efforts undertaken by the United Nations system. Moreover, activities undertaken with the objective of improving the status of women had experienced an average biennial growth rate of 20 per cent.

23. Standard setting, UNESCO's studies and research, operational activities and activities undertaken in co-operation with its member States and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations were largely concerned with making education more democratic, training women, job prospects for women and the effects of the media on the changing roles of men and women.

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(Mrs. Wynter, UNESCO)

24. The presence of the Director-General, at the head of a delegation of 11, at the Copenhagen Conference and the number of documents submitted to the Conference demonstrated the importance which UNESCO had attached to that meeting. The Executive Board would have the report of the World Conference on its agenda at its 1981 spring session and would determine the action which UNESCO should take on the many resolutions of concern to it.

25. With respect to the proposal on the elaboration of a draft declaration on the participation of women in the struggle for the strengthening of international peace and security, it should be recalled that UNESCO had stressed that that question should be considered in conjunction with resolution 13.2 adopted by the General Conference at its twentieth session. That resolution referred to the tremendous opportunities which UNESCO had to promote women's equal participation in the process of social development and the struggle for peace, to broaden the process of détente and take measures of disarmament.

26. Mr. AL-MOKHTAR (United Arab Emirates) said that since independence the United Arab Emirates had constantly striven to improve the status of women. Women had an important role to play at every level of society, especially in teaching. Under the national legislation, there was no discrimination on grounds of sex.

27. He praised Palestinian women who were fighting against the racist régime that was occupying Palestine. One day they would be free from Zionist tyranny and despotism. He condemned the discrimination suffered by the black majority in South Africa.

28. His country endorsed the resolutions and the Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women. He trusted that women would one day be completely free to fulfil their proper role.

29. Mrs. ONYANGO (Kenya) said that the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women had demonstrated the need to intensify measures for the advancement of women in all areas of economic, political and social life. Her Government supported the Programme of Action adopted at Copenhagen, but fully realized that it would require a great deal of work and resources to implement its recommendations. Her Government would do its utmost to contribute to the success of activities undertaken to that end.

30. It was well known that women constituted half of the world's population and that the economic, social and political problems facing mankind today could never be solved without their full involvement and participation. Her delegation therefore thought it was necessary to change the social structures, attitudes, practices and laws which underlay inequalities between men and women. The Kenyan Government was attempting to bridge the gap which existed between men and women, notably in education, training, employment and business. Those sectors had been given priority in the Development Plan for 1979-1983, and several programmes had been initiated, in both urban and rural zones, to meet the goals of the Decade.

(Mrs. Onyango, Kenya)

Her Government had continued to finance multipurpose programmes aimed at solving most of the problems affecting women, especially those who lived and worked in rural areas.

31. She repeated her Government's offer to provide the venue for the world conference on women to be held in 1985. She referred to the support which the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women had given Kenya. She noted with satisfaction that the Fund had committed almost \$5 million to activities in Africa. At the Copenhagen Conference Kenya had pledged \$20,000 as a symbol of its commitment to the work of the Fund, and it urged every country able to do so to contribute generously to the Fund.

32. Her delegation had taken note with satisfaction of the report of the Secretary-General on the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women. It also endorsed the recommendation of the Copenhagen Conference, adopted by consensus, that the Institute should identify and undertake research and training programmes to facilitate the implementation of the relevant parts of the Programme of Action. With reference to the recruitment of staff for the Institute, which had already begun, she emphasized that the posts available should be filled on the basis of equitable geographical distribution.

33. She welcomed the United Nations Secretary-General's decision to establish a liaison unit in New York to facilitate the work of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs with regard to the implementation of the Copenhagen recommendations.

34. Mr. MUCORLOR (Liberia) said that his delegation had taken note with satisfaction of the report of the Copenhagen Conference. Liberia firmly believed in the equality of women, as was demonstrated by the opportunities the Government gave them to participate in the country's economic, political, social and religious life on an equal footing with men. Liberia would, in the near future, ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which it considered an instrument for the achievement of freedom, equality and justice.

35. His delegation supported those countries which advocated the holding of the 1985 world conference on women in a third world country. It trusted that the United Nations would finance it. He appealed to Member States, particularly third world States, to give further support to the Voluntary Fund for the Decade. Any attempt to reduce its resources would endanger development projects undertaken for women.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.