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**REPORT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING
FOR THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN**

Vienna, 17-21 October 1994

I. Opening of the Meeting

1. In decision K (48) the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) decided to convene in 1994, at a high level, a regional preparatory meeting for the Fourth World Conference on Women Action for Equality, Development and Peace, to be held at Beijing in September 1995. The other regional commissions of the United Nations also undertook to convene such regional preparatory meetings for their regions. The Regional Preparatory Conference was held at Jakarta in June 1994 for the Asia and Pacific region and at Mar del Plata, in September 1994 for the Latin America and Caribbean region. Similar conferences were scheduled to take place at Amman for Western Asia, and at Dakar for Africa, in November 1994.

2. The High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting of ECE was held at Vienna from 17 to 21 October 1994.

3. The Meeting was opened by the Executive Secretary of ECE. He welcomed all delegations and thanked all countries and organizations which had made financial contributions. He thanked in particular the Government of Austria for the generous facilities offered for the Meeting. In his statement he emphasized the increased awareness which had emerged of the role of women in society since the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, held at Nairobi in 1985. He summarized progress made over the past decade in the status of women in the ECE region in such areas as women's increased participation in decision-making, growing awareness of the human rights of women, adoption of legislation aimed at ensuring equality between women and men, establishment and strengthening of national machinery for the advancement of women, and women's increased contribution to the economy. But he also pointed to the many less positive trends affecting women

in the region, such as the economic recession, the transition process in central and eastern Europe, the increasing number of refugees and the growing segregation of women in low-paid and part-time jobs. The "Regional Platform for Action", which the Meeting was expected to adopt, addressed those issues and was intended to be a main regional input for the Fourth World Conference on Women. ECE was ready to carry out, in cooperation with other subregional and regional organizations, any work which the Fourth World Conference on Women decided to assign to it.

II. Attendance

4. The Meeting was attended by representatives from 45 States members of ECE. One country participated under article 8 and eight countries under article 11 of the ECE terms of reference.
5. Representatives of organizations of the United Nations system and specialized agencies as well as other intergovernmental organizations were in attendance.
6. Non-governmental organizations were represented in accordance with the rules of procedure of the Meeting.
7. A complete list of participants is contained in document E/ECE/RW/HLM/INF.1/Rev.2.

III. Agenda and organization of work

8. The Meeting adopted the following agenda :
 1. Opening of the Meeting
 2. Adoption of the agenda
 3. Adoption of the rules of procedure
 4. Election of officers
 5. Review and appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies on Equality, Development and Peace
 6. Women and the economy:
 - (a) Trends in women's role in the economy
 - (b) Demographic and statistical trends and issues
 - (c) Women's access to employment and entrepreneurship
 - (d) Role of women in the transition processes
 7. Women in public life and governance
 8. The ECE input into the Platform for Action
 9. Adoption of the report
 10. Closing of the Meeting.

9. The Meeting also approved its rules of procedure (E/ECE/RW/HLM/L.2), which were based on the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of ECE with additional provisions concerning the Bureau and participation of non-governmental organizations.

10. In accordance with rule 12 of its rules of procedure, the Meeting established one open-ended drafting group for the preparation of the Regional Platform for Action, which was intended to be the major regional contribution to the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Meeting took note of the consensus reached on having Ms. Irene Freudenschuß (Austria) as Moderator of the group.

IV. Election of officers

11. The Meeting elected the following officers:

<u>Chairperson:</u>	Ms. Johanna Dohnal (Austria)
<u>Vice-Chairpersons:</u>	Ms. Sheila Finestone (Canada) Mr. Andrei M. Panov (Russian Federation) Ms. Hildegard Puwak (Romania) Ms. Elisabeth Rehn (Finland) Ms. Miet Smet (Belgium)
<u>Rapporteur:</u>	Mr. Ireneusz Matela (Poland)

V. Opening statements

12. The Chairperson of the Meeting said that the political changes in eastern Europe had made it possible for the first time ever to hold a Europe-wide regional preparatory meeting for a world conference on women at the intergovernmental level. She called on Governments to put women's rights in the mainstream of the political, economic and social agendas. The countries of the region should use the Meeting to establish formal and informal networks and cooperation schemes and to learn from each other's experiences in building national machinery. If the Meeting helped to strengthen the institutional capacity in the region, it would have a lasting impact on the betterment of lives of women and men everywhere.

13. The Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women emphasized that the decisions taken in the ECE region had a global impact. She stated that the 54 member countries of the ECE region comprised one fifth of the world's population and four fifths of its wealth. However, in the most prosperous nations, with the highest standards of living, there were people living in substandard conditions, particularly in central and eastern Europe. In the world of women there were few developed nations. She stated that while there had been advancements for the region's women in terms of legislation, public policy, education and employment, women's political representation was generally low. Moreover, women earned on average 40 per cent less than men, ran a higher risk of unemployment than men and assumed an unequal share of family responsibilities. The plight of migrant workers was of particular concern. Despite recent reductions in military expenditures, there was little evidence of a so-called "peace dividend" being channelled into social development and the advancement of women. The Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women expressed the hope that the advancement of women, and society as a whole, would receive the support of Governments and non-governmental organizations so that the aims of the Platform for Action to be adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women could be attained.

14. The Convenor of the Vienna NGO Forum 94 on Women said that the European and North American women's movements had made great strides in their struggle for equity between women and men. At the same time, the radical changes taking place in the political, economic and social structures in the ECE region had an impact on women, who were faced with the difficult task of ensuring their right to participate in the formation of the new structures. The Vienna NGO Forum 94 had dealt with the issues and devised strategies for strengthening the international women's movement to provide an input for the Platform for Action. The international women's movement had been addressing a vast range of issues and some achievements had been made. Women's advocacy had changed the way the world looked at socio-economic development and fundamental rights. Violence against women was increasingly considered a criminal offence. The education and health of girls was increasingly viewed as the highest form of investment in human capital. More attention should be given to the sections of the Platform for Action concerned with financial arrangements and implementing mechanisms. Women and Governments were able to be partners in the work for the advancement of women.

15. The Chairperson of the ECE/NGO Working Group on Women stated that within the Vienna NGO Forum 94 there had been workshops on 12 main themes including the human rights of women, women's contribution to peace, equality of education, promotion of the economic and social development of women, improvement of the participation of women in national and international decision-making and other important issues. The report of the Forum contained specific recommendations for improving the situation of women. As the women of the ECE region felt solidarity with women throughout the world, they hoped that their ideas would be taken into consideration during the preparatory work for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

VI. Review and appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies on Equality, Development and Peace

16. The High-level Preparatory Meeting considered item 5 of its agenda, on the review and appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies on Equality, Development and Peace. It had before it the report prepared by the ECE secretariat, the Regional review and appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies on Equality, Development and Peace, contained in document E/ECE/RW/HLM/1. The report had been prepared on the basis of national reports available at the time of writing.

17. The objective of the review and appraisal was to assess progress and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the strategies in the ECE region, as well as to highlight the new priorities for action for the advancement of women in the countries concerned.

18. Ministers and heads of delegations described the situation of women in their own countries within a regional context. Among the wide-ranging topics of concern were human rights; women in the political process and in public life; economies in transition; employment; education; migrant and refugee women; violence against women; and women's health, including reproductive rights. Although the opinion was expressed that much had been done for the achievement of equality on a judicial basis, much more had to be done to achieve effective and substantial equality. Governments, institutions at all levels, community-development and women's groups had a key role to play in achieving equality.

19. Representatives felt that the Forward-looking Strategies were on the way to being implemented. The amount of progress made varied from country to country.

20. Several representatives stressed that gender equality concerned not only women but also all social strata, groups, non-governmental organizations and Governments. Increasing attention was being paid to the ability of people, men and women, to meet as partners in fulfilling common tasks, with equal

rights and shared responsibilities whether in family, professional life, terms of social commitment or political responsibility.

21. It was pointed out that the relationship between the sexes needed to be put on a new footing of solidarity and mutual respect of fundamental human rights, and that the social and political roles of men and women needed to be revised. It was emphasized that human rights also included women's rights and that increasing attention was being paid by the international community to women's rights.

22. It was felt that while matters relating to women had tended to be dealt with primarily under the aspect of discrimination, there should henceforth be greater emphasis on changing institutions and social systems, involving women in those changes from the outset. The interests of women had to represent a permanent core of policy strategies. One prerequisite was that women should be fully involved in the decision-making process in political, economic and social fields.

23. Significant achievements were reported in the representation of women in national parliaments and public administrations. Nevertheless, some representatives expressed concern about the low level of women's participation in public life. Several said that their Governments had set up targets with a view to increasing the number of public appointments held by women. However, other representatives expressed the opinion that the fixing of quotas for women would undermine women's effort to demonstrate their abilities based on merit and would discriminate against men.

24. Representatives of countries with economies in transition drew attention to the phenomenon of the setbacks in women's participation in public life, which had brought about a steep fall in the number of women elected to parliament. Formerly, women had higher representation, supported by quotas; however, they had no real power in decision-making. Recent evidence suggested that there had been some improvement in that sphere, although it could not be regarded as adequate.

25. One positive tendency under way in countries with economies in transition was that of a growing private sector, with a larger number of women, entrepreneurs and in managerial posts. None the less, women entrepreneurs were discriminated against in that business start-up credits were usually unavailable to them.

26. It was noted that gender segregation in the labour market could be considered a structural obstacle to equality. It resulted in different terms of employment for women and men: women were to a greater extent than men employed part-time, predominantly in the service sector; their pay was in general lower; and they were practically non-existent in the top jobs in private industry. In times of economic recession there was a major risk of deterioration in the status of women in working life. It was necessary to open up new areas of work and establish more diverse working patterns to facilitate women's access to, and ensure the smooth functioning of, the labour market.

27. Progress towards equality of remuneration had either stalled or slowed down, depending on the country. Even in cases where women received equivalent or higher education than men, inequalities of remuneration continued.

28. The reconciliation between women's participation in working life and their unpaid family responsibilities continued to be an area of concern at the policy level. Work hours devoted by women to child care had increased. Positive trends were that maternity leave had been extended in many countries, and more and more fathers were benefiting from parental leave.

29. Attention must be paid to action which would ensure changes not only in economic and social areas, but also in technology. It was felt that education in those issues was crucial. Equally important

was raising awareness and incorporating women's issues into the curricula of institutions of higher learning.

30. Various problems were being experienced in the countries in transition where women were having to come to terms with a changed economic and social order, which affected them particularly badly. Although there was a high share of women among the employed, women also constituted the majority of unemployed. That situation did not signal the emancipation of women in economic life. Furthermore, women were still being underemployed in terms of their educational level. The importance of a data-gathering system to ensure that all statistics were broken down by sex was emphasized.

31. Several representatives of countries in transition recognized that their national machinery for the advancement of women as not sufficiently developed or structured fully to promote women and that numerous problems remained. Despite legislative advances, there were many areas in which women were still unable to exercise their rights, owing to entrenched perceptions of women's role in society.

32. It was felt that particular attention should be given to migrant women, especially concerning the problem of illegal trafficking in women and their forced sexual exploitation, and particularly among women from developing countries and countries in transition.

33. In some countries, as a result of internal migration, many women were confined to the shantytowns that were spreading around the cities and were deprived of the relative independence of village life, working informally as housekeepers or child minders.

34. All countries reported progress in the adoption of legislation aimed at enhancing equality between women and men, in the establishment of national machinery or other multinational means for strengthening women's position in society. Such machinery could be an integral part of the administration of Governments or established in other forms. Many countries had already shared their experiences of creating such machinery.

35. It was felt that violence against women was not sufficiently recognized in society. The major challenge was to change the attitudes of men, to make women more self-confident and psychologically mature. In some countries, violence in families was usually treated as a private problem. In all cases where women were subjected to violence there should be women interpreters, social workers and police officers to work with them. The specialized training courses held in one country for the police were described.

36. The problem of sexual violence was emphasized. Some representatives stated that sexual violence against women was closely linked to the lack of equality and to unequal power relations as the underlying causes of conflict between women and men. In several countries, legal protection against sexual harassment in the workplace was promised but concrete progress had yet to be made.

37. Grave concern was expressed about serious violations of human rights in armed conflicts, which aggravated the position of women in particular. Post-war efforts should include welfare schemes for peasant and urban women living alone, elderly women, unemployed women and refugee women.

38. Many representatives emphasized women's participation in the media and ongoing support for women's organizations. Attention was drawn to the powerful influence of the mass media in shaping the image of women and to the fact that traditional stereotypes did not change as quickly as the status of women was changing. The media should be sensitized to build and convey a positive image of women more in line with reality. Some delegations expressed concern that such action might be in contradiction with the fundamental right to freedom of expression.

39. It was suggested that the implementation of international instruments adopted by the United Nations was of relevance for future policies, among which was the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. The importance of the implementing the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women was stressed.

40. There was general support for the opinion that the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development, to be held at Copenhagen in March 1995, should also address women's issues.

41. Representatives of bodies and specialized agencies of the United Nations expressed their commitment to working in cooperation with all partners to advance women's agendas and stressed that their involvement in the preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference on Women was a consequence of their policy on the promotion, within their respective spheres of competence, of equality of opportunities between women and men. Among their main objectives were the importance of sustainable human development; gender equality in the world of work; protection of women and children refugees and asylum-seeking women; women and peace; data collection and analysis; development cooperation; strengthening the capacity of Governments to address gender, environment and human environment issues; empowering women to take their rightful position in society; and promoting the establishment of non-governmental organizations.

42. Intergovernmental and regional organizations stressed the importance in an increasingly global economy of solidarity on women's concerns. Great importance was attached, for example, to ensuring that women could participate on an equal footing with men in all the development cooperation programmes of those organizations.

43. Representatives of groups of non-governmental organizations made presentations to the Meeting. Among their concerns were trafficking in women, refugees, domestic and sexual violence, women farmers and lesbians. One of the issues raised at the Meeting was the situation of disabled women. It was particularly requested that such women be included as participants in the Beijing World Conference, especially in official delegations.

44. Representatives of non-governmental organizations requested that their areas of concern should be reflected in the Regional Platform of Action. The importance of the input of the ECE High-Level Regional Meeting, particularly the Regional Platform of Action, to the Beijing World Conference was generally agreed on by the Meeting.

45. The delegations of Cyprus and Turkey requested a right of reply and asked that their statements be recorded verbatim in the report of the Meeting. That was not possible for two reasons. First, verbatim records had not been made of the Meeting; secondly, no reference had been made in the report to the statements of specific delegations. The replies, however, would be kept for the record.

46. The delegation of Greece requested permission to exercise the right of reply. The delegation requested that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia should not use the name "Republic of Macedonia", but the name under which it had been admitted to the United Nations, in accordance with Security Council resolution 817 of 7 April 1993 and the relevant General Assembly resolution, and that it should not continue to act in defiance of those resolutions.

VII. Women and the economy

47. The Regional Preparatory Meeting considered agenda item 6, on women and the economy. It had before it the following reports prepared by the secretariat: (a) Trends in women's role in the economy (E/ECE/RW/HLM/2); (b) Demographic trends and statistical issues (E/ECE/RW/HLM/3 and

Add.1); (c) Women's access to employment and entrepreneurship (E/ECE/RW/HLM/4); and (d) The role of women in the transition processes: facing a major challenge (E/ECE/RW/HLM/5).

48. Many participants shared the opinion that the Regional Preparatory Meeting provided an important platform for a discussion on women's situation at the regional level and congratulated the ECE secretariat on organizing the Meeting. They commended the ECE secretariat for the high quality of the reports that it had prepared in close cooperation with several specialized agencies of the United Nations, in particular the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which had played a leading role in the preparation of the report on women's access to employment and entrepreneurship (E/ECE/RW/HLM/4).

(a) Trends in women's role in the economy

49. One of the major themes of the discussion on agenda item 6 (a) was the new dimension of women's role in the economy and its many consequences for development in the ECE region. Many participants emphasized that the role of women in the economy had significantly increased in their countries. Women's skills and qualifications had become central to economic growth and women's issues were moving into the mainstream of the economic agenda. Women's new role in the economy had not been fully recognized at the conceptual and policy levels despite the introduction of progressive legislation in many countries. That fact could have significant adverse implications for economic growth. Many participants, including the representative of the European Union, agreed that the debate on women's role in the economy required careful discussion at the Beijing Conference.

50. Many participants shared the view that the new role of women in the economy was part of a deep economic and social transformation in countries of the ECE region. Economic and social aspects of growth were becoming more closely interrelated and many institutions were being questioned from the point of view of their human concerns. The discussion of women's concerns had to take place within the context of the ongoing debate on finding new ways of organizing modern society. The reorganization of societies was mentioned in the discussion.

51. A number of participants emphasized that the search for innovative solutions to sharing family and work responsibilities was a most urgent task. One participant stated that women no longer had a choice between work and family responsibilities, that they had to combine both; and that some women were also involved in political and social activities. Many participants pointed out that women's responsibilities had increased significantly as a result of their more active participation in the labour market and the privatization of many social services. One participant suggested that perhaps the entire rhythm of the working day should be changed. Men and women could equally share work and family responsibilities by being employed on a part-time basis and taking care of their families.

52. A number of participants acknowledged the importance of education in increasing the role of women in the economy. Despite the impressive progress that had been made, however, the better education of European women had not sufficiently resulted in a strengthening of their position on the labour market and within the decision-making structures. There had been some concern that some forms of education, such as apprenticeship and vocational training, were not gender-focused. A number of participants advocated modernizing training and enlarging the target groups. The importance of education for rural women was stressed by many participants. Several participants discussed obstacles to the integration of rural women into the economy.

53. Other issues discussed under agenda item 6 (a) included the adverse effects of recession on women and the proliferation of poverty, in particular among single mothers; and the impact of globalization, industrial restructuring and technology changes on women. One participant was of the view that the detrimental effects of industrial restructuring on female employment could be transformed into opportunities once appropriate training and access to technology had been secured. Another participant

pointed out that the development of science and technology focused more on men's needs than on women's, for example in the area of health. One reason could be that women were heavily underrepresented in councils and committees that approved research programmes. It was suggested that Governments and agencies should review their programmes on science and technology from a gender perspective. It was also suggested that more attention should be given to analysing the impact of international trade on women.

54. The importance of community-based initiatives aimed at going beyond the traditional objective of raising awareness was discussed. One participant mentioned that, in many countries in the ECE region, the role of local initiatives in organizing educational and training programmes and promoting women's entrepreneurship was rapidly expanding.

55. Many participants emphasized that political measures to enhance the status of women must be more closely integrated in-to the economic, financial, social and employment policies of individual countries, in the European Union and worldwide. Referring to policies and strategies to promote the new role of women in the economy, many participants stated that there was a need to develop gender-based data to be used in a critical assessment of women's situation and role in the economy.

56. Many participants underlined the need to ensure the formulation of realistic goals and strategies on women's role in the economy. A number of participants referred to the usefulness of the Meeting, which provided an important forum in which to foster the principles of the ECE member States for improving equal opportunities for women and to establish a common platform for action and policies. Those subjects would require careful discussion at the Beijing Conference.

(b) Demographic and statistical trends and issues

57. Several participants drew attention to the falling birth rates in some countries in transition and noted that that phenomenon was a consequence of, *inter alia*, deteriorating economic conditions. It was noted that women were reluctant to have children under unstable economic and social conditions. One participant stated that in the areas affected by the Chernobyl nuclear accident, sharp declines in birth rates had been observed and that that trend had been accompanied by increases in morbidity among women and children. The consequences of the nuclear accident on the health of the population in those areas would be felt for many years to come.

58. It was stressed that the improved nutrition and health of women, including better reproductive health, increased their general well-being, their labour productivity, as well as their ability to compete on the labour market and to succeed in business. In turn, women's participation in the labour force, combined with the exercise of their reproductive rights, improved their health, as a result of, *inter alia*, lower fertility and lower pregnancy- and birth-related morbidity. Several speakers emphasized that poor reproductive health and limited reproductive rights and choices had an adverse effect on women's well-being, impeding their participation in business and the labour market.

59. Several participants spoke of women migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, whose numbers had increased throughout the ECE region in recent years. The conditions and the status of those women were typically lower than those of non-migrant women, and they belonged to some of the most vulnerable groups. One significant aspect of recent migratory movements, according to one participant, was the increasing mingling of populations of different ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds. That development added a new racial aspect to the migration and refugee problems that some countries were experiencing, which required the attention of Governments and policy makers.

60. Several participants pointed out that the development of gender-disaggregated statistics was a global enterprise and that a number of ECE countries had led the way by establishing strong national

machinery for that purpose. Even in those countries, however, more work needed to be done; and in too many countries the work had barely begun. It was pointed out that a key element in improving gender-disaggregated statistics was strong user-producer cooperation, that is, close working relationships between national statisticians, as well as between academic researchers and interested advocates, and that there were many good examples of such cooperation in the ECE region. It was also noted that there was a need further to strengthen ties with the ECE secretariat on economic statistics and demographics.

61. The Meeting was informed that a second edition of *The World's Women 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics* would constitute one of the documents before the Beijing Conference. The extraordinary success of the first issue of the publication (25,000 copies had been distributed and sold) clearly demonstrated the demand for useful statistics on women. An updated version of WISTAT, the United Nations women's database, was being prepared and would be available in a CD-ROM version later.

62. Several participants referred to the lack of gender-disaggregated statistics in some countries in transition and the need to improve data and research on gender issues in those countries. Given the economic strains of transition on women in particular, gender-specific statistics were needed for policy makers and Governments for monitoring social policies, as well as for implementing strategies for the advancement of women. The Meeting was informed that the World Bank considered gender-disaggregated statistics to be of primary importance and was prepared to give technical assistance to countries in transition so that they could improve their databases in order to carry out gender-disaggregated analyses.

63. Several participants stated that it was crucial to collect and analyse data on differences between the situations of men and women and to ensure that women had access to such information. One participant said that in her country women's information centres had played an important role in the dissemination of information on women.

64. The development of statistics on issues concerning women's rights was regarded by one participant as being of high priority. Many participants stated that there was a need to develop statistics on domestic violence. Statistics on women's participation in economic and political life had been used to document the current situation of women in their countries.

(c) Women's access to employment and entrepreneurship

65. Several representatives pointed to the major changes that had taken place in women's contribution to the economy. The increased participation of women had been found not to be sensitive to the economic cycle and women could no longer be regarded as a reserve army of labour. In some cases women's employment rate equalled that of men. One representative pointed to the weakening of the influence of motherhood on participation. Women's professional activity was viewed less and less as an alternative to family life and women should not be regarded as having to choose between the two. Nevertheless it was noted that even in countries where women had made most progress towards equality at the early stages of their careers, becoming mothers imposed costs as women lost skills and suffered a deterioration in their labour market position.

66. Representatives also expressed concern at the high level of unemployment among women in transition economies, in the European Union and elsewhere. Young people might be asked to bear disproportionate costs of adjustment, and young women often faced much higher risks of unemployment than their male counterparts. Since in some cases highly educated women formed a large share of the unemployed, the problem was not confined to low-skilled workers. Action might be needed to ensure that women benefited fairly from measures to combat unemployment.

67. Many representatives noted that women were concentrated increasingly in part-time, atypical and precarious work. The integration of women into the wage economy had coincided with a period in which there was a deterioration in both job security and social protection. Some representatives stressed that part-time and atypical employment should provide the same rights and status as full-time employment. One representative proposed that women should not accept atypical jobs which did not provide a living wage, and that action should be taken to provide better security and more safety nets for atypical workers.

68. Several representatives identified positive aspects of flexible work arrangements. Greater flexibility with regard to working hours offered both men and women more opportunity to reconcile work and family life, while at the same time meeting corporate needs. The flexible arrangement of working hours should address the working patterns of both men and women and must not result in the exploitation of women. The need to involve men in part-time work was stressed by a number of representatives, although the continued unpopularity of part-time jobs among men was noted. One solution suggested was to seek to raise part-time work to a status where it was regarded as a fully satisfactory arrangement for both men and women and for persons at all levels of the occupational hierarchy. That would involve promoting part-time work even in managerial-level positions. Part-time workers should not be trapped in low-paid jobs and attention should be paid to providing a path from part-time and low-skilled jobs to full-time and higher qualified work. One representative proposed that part-time workers should have the right to return to full-time work if they wished to do so.

69. Representatives also pointed to the continued underrepresentation of women in entrepreneurship. The growth of a service-oriented economy in principle provided new opportunities for a stronger economic role for women. Although the share of women among entrepreneurs was increasing, more efforts were needed to ensure that women's potential expertise was being tapped in the formation of new enterprises. Micro and small-scale enterprises were increasingly important for economic development and trade at the local and national level, and more needed to be done to ensure that women had the necessary access to credit and resources.

70. The need to cope with problems related to gender segregation in the employment system was reaffirmed by several representatives. Gender segregation was clearly linked to the continuing pay gap between men and women and to the undervaluation of women and women's skills in society. More needed to be done to break down gender segregation, especially in training systems which often reinforced such segregation. Action was needed to encourage diversification in choice of subjects, and in particular to encourage women to specialize in science and technology areas and to train for occupations traditionally held by men. The low share of women in high-level occupations required particular attention. Women should be encouraged to move into growing sectors, and attention also needed to be paid to the valuation attached to jobs which utilized the skills women acquired in the home.

71. One representative pointed to measures taken to encourage a new approach to the valuation of women's skills by the establishment of a new system of job evaluation, overseen by a joint committee of social partners, where skills in human relations and interactions and caring skills and responsibilities were given special attention. Another representative stressed the importance of involving women directly in the wage-setting process, for example, in the institutions of collective pay negotiation.

72. Poverty was identified by representatives as increasingly a women's issue in all parts of the ECE region. The causes of the feminization of poverty were related to the changes in households, the growth of single-parent families and the increasing share of older women in the economy. They were also associated with the growth of atypical and low-paid employment areas in which women were concentrated. Many working women were not able to earn enough to be self-sufficient. Problems of poverty in old age might not be resolved unless greater recognition was given to the contributions women made through unpaid as well as paid work.

73. In developing policies to promote equality for women on the labour market, some representatives stressed that it was important not to view women as an homogeneous group. Particular attention might need to be paid, for example, to the interests of rural women, disabled women and members of ethnic minorities. One representative urged that policies to encourage job creation must remain a priority. Other representatives called for greater efforts to be made in the coordination and standardization of equal-opportunities policies and in the application of international conventions and labour standards. New measures might need to be taken to tackle the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace. One representative said that the goal of equal opportunities was dependent upon women achieving economic independence but that that objective could be achieved only if women's employment opportunities were secured and equal pay policies implemented.

(d) Role of women in the transition processes

74. Many participants referred to the problems of women in countries in transition. All stressed that building market economies was a major challenge for women and Governments in the ECE region. Several participants stated that the report on the role of women in the transition processes: facing a major challenge (E/ECE/RW/HLM/5) was well documented and provided a good framework for the discussion on agenda item 6 (d).

75. Although numerous participants indicated that the emerging market economies in their countries were bringing new opportunities to women and men, most of the participants who spoke on the subject emphasized the strong adverse effects on women of the transition process. Participants from transition economies stressed that women were currently more exposed than men to the hardships of transition, which accounted for a large share of the social costs of systemic changes. At the same time, it was pointed out, the low participation of women at the decision-making level limited their impact on institution-building, thus posing the serious threat that many of the needs and concerns of women would be neglected in the emerging market.

76. Many participants emphasized that women would be threatened with exclusion from the labour market if adequate measures were not taken. Women's position in the labour market was rapidly deteriorating because of fast-growing female unemployment rates, which in many countries were higher than male unemployment rates. Some participants stressed that massive bankruptcies were to be expected in many branches of industry, a circumstance that could further affect female unemployment. Decreasing household incomes led to sharply increasing poverty among women, in particular among single mothers, women in areas most affected by industrial restructuring, and rural women. Economic crises and social distress were directly related to increased crime and domestic violence, which in turn directly affected women.

77. Many participants expressed concern that, as a result of the transition process, the social infrastructure was often weakened, with serious adverse effects on women. A number of representatives referred to the rapid deterioration of state-provided child-care services. It was pointed out that social development could not be considered a luxury reserved for wealthy nations only; it should be a basic ingredient of the transition process. A number of speakers supported the reorganization of social infrastructures from a gender perspective.

78. Several participants discussed tendencies to revive patriarchal models of gender roles. They also stressed the need to take action aimed at eliminating social acceptance of gender-based discrimination and at modifying traditional value systems and attitudes.

79. A few participants pointed out that there were a number of successful women entrepreneurs in the fast-growing private sector, in particular in small and medium-size enterprises. Mention was made of important female assets in the new market environment, such as good general education, complex skills

such as networking, flexibility, the ability to find solutions at all costs, as well as non-standard thinking, acquired while managing household resources under conditions characterized by shortages. Measures needed to be taken to ensure that women had access to financial resources and property, as well as to more market-oriented education and training.

80. A number of participants were concerned that adequate support was not being provided for women in transitional economies. Some participants from countries in transition pointed to the importance of such support from the international community. It was suggested that among other things, programmes financed by international agencies should be gender-sensitive.

81. The importance of establishing a broad forum in which to discuss women's issues in the transition process was mentioned. Several participants underlined the role that non-governmental organizations could play in that process.

82. As women represented an untapped asset in the transition process, addressing their concerns could lead to a more efficient allocation of resources in the process of market-building. The formulation of adequate policies in that area was crucial for the reform process. Gender-disaggregated socio-economic data and their analysis should serve as a basis for formulating those policies.

VIII. Women in public life and governance

83. The High-level Preparatory Meeting considered item 7 of its agenda, on women in public life and governance. It had before it the report prepared by the ECE secretariat on Women in public life and governance (E/ECE/RW/HLM/6). The three main concerns of the Meeting in that regard were the continued underrepresentation of women in public life and its implications; the possible routes that might be taken to improve women's representation; and the relationship between human rights and women's rights.

84. Many participants commented on the continued underrepresentation of women in public life, in governance and in all areas of public decision-making. One participant drew attention to the fact that although women had made gains over the past years in the economic field, those gains had not been translated into the democratic arena. Progress in improving women's representation was noted to be extremely patchy and in some areas women's representation had actually declined. Some participants did point to major gains made by women in their own countries, where in some cases representation in government was over 40 per cent and approaching 50 per cent. Those gains were very recent but it was hoped that they could provide a role model for other countries.

85. A major question touched upon by a number of participants was whether the underrepresentation of women had made any difference. There was widespread and strong affirmation of the view that underrepresentation did matter; examples were offered by participants of cases where the increased inclusion of women had widened the scope of issues considered within the political and public arenas and had led to different decisions on final policies. Many participants pointed out that the exclusion or underrepresentation of women increasingly threatened the validity of decision-making; women were not fully involved in decisions that would have a direct effect on their lives, including their reproductive rights and their economic and social rights. One participant stressed that women needed to be involved as full partners in all stages of the decision-making process, beginning with information gathering. The issue was not just to take into account women's interests but to involve women fully in the process. Women's underrepresentation also had other consequences, as it affected the whole way in which public and political life was organized. That related not only to the time schedules associated with participation in public life, which were incompatible with child-caring responsibilities, but also to the manner and language in which political debate was conducted. One participant expressed the hope that greater

involvement of women in public life would further the principle of unity in diversity, and that the objective of the empowerment of women would be to increase the range of issues and modes of engagement in public life.

86. As participants confirmed the significance of women's involvement in public life, they also debated the obstacles that existed to full participation and the range of policies and actions that could be taken to enhance women's position. One problem identified was that women's greater involvement in the private or family sphere sometimes impeded their participation in public life. Those problems could be alleviated if better child-care facilities were provided. Another issue raised by one participant was the need for specific training programmes to enhance women's capacity to participate in public life.

87. One of the major issues discussed was how to overcome specific obstacles to equality in public life. It was pointed out, for example, that the increased participation of women in employment was proving insufficient to bring about such equality. Some participants spoke of the benefits that had been derived in their countries from applying quotas and targets for women's representation in political and public bodies, while others advocated the development of new measures to promote women's participation through the application of the concept of "parity democracy", whereby democratic bodies and representation should be based upon the existence of two equal sexes. Several participants expressed concern over the use of quotas, targets, and the concept of "parity democracy", expressing the view that women should be empowered, not on the basis of their sex but of their political expertise or ideas. The role of Government in influencing the selection of persons for democratic office was also questioned.

88. Many participants stressed that any policy measure would remain ineffective unless backed by political will. Where women had made gains in public decision-making, participants stressed that that success was based upon shared values and commitment to gender equality. Some participants recognized a role for Governments in developing such political will and in sensitizing society to the existence of discrimination. The media, although capable of playing such a role, had so far perhaps retarded the rate at which women's public image had changed.

89. Participants greatly stressed the importance of the role played by non-governmental organizations in developing public recognition of women's rights. They recognized that women already participated very actively in a whole range of non-governmental organizations, especially those operating at a local or community level. Skills learnt by women through participating in those groups were identified as providing extremely valuable experience for women who wished to participate in public life. Several participants called for measures to be developed to enable women to build upon their experience in non-governmental organizations. Some participants also expressed the opinion that there was a new era of cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organizations which was enabling women's issues to be better represented within public decision-making bodies. The creativity that non-governmental organizations had already shown in promoting women's issues and concerns needed to be harnessed further in the cause of improving women's participation in public life. Some participants also called attention to affirmative-action policies adopted within the public or the private sector to promote women to higher-level occupations. In that regard, stress was placed on the need for commitment from the very top of an organization.

90. Many participants reaffirmed that women's human rights were an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. One participant reported that progress still needed to be made in encouraging countries to carry out gender-disaggregated analyses of human rights situations. Several participants affirmed that women should be regarded as having rights, rather than as a category requiring special protection. Another participant pointed out that all the rights that women had won so far had not been bestowed as a gift on women but had been won through group action and organization.

91. Many representatives of non-governmental organizations spoke on the underrepresentation of women in public life and on the need to reaffirm women's rights to full representation in public life. Even highly educated women were underrepresented in public life, and efforts had still to be made to improve the training of women, particularly in transition economies. The empowerment of women in areas such as science would inevitably lead to changes in the way science was conducted and to dismantling the privileges associated with scientific work and organization. Solidarity was also expressed with women in societies at war and a call was made to involve women more in decision-making so that war would be avoided more often in the future. One participant called attention to incompatibilities between the establishment and protection of women's rights and certain fundamentalist beliefs and practices, while others called for efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to care for the future generations of women by paying particular attention to the girl child.

IX. The ECE input into the Platform for Action

92. At its 10th session, the Meeting adopted by consensus the Regional Platform for Action, "Women in a Changing World - Call for Action from an ECE Perspective", contained in Document E/ECE/RW/HLM/8.

93. Whilst joining the consensus, the delegation of Malta reserved its position on the use of such terms as "reproductive health", "reproductive rights" and the "regulation of fertility" in the Platform consistent with its national laws on abortion and with its acceptance of international human rights documents.

X. Adoption of the report

94. The Meeting adopted its report at its 10th session, on 21 October 1994.

XI. Closing of the Meeting

95. In her closing statement, Mrs. J. Dohnal, Chairperson of the Meeting, stated that the Meeting reflected well the progress achieved since the Nairobi Conference. With the Regional Platform for Action adopted by the Meeting, a comprehensive and action-oriented programme had been formulated which could become a vital tool for the implementation of national policies. Mr. Y. Berthelot, the Executive Secretary of ECE, expressed his appreciation to all the delegations for their valuable contributions to the success of the Meeting. He thanked the Government of Austria and the staff of the United Nations Office at Vienna for their outstanding support and cooperation. Mrs. Dohnal then pronounced the High-level Meeting closed.