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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 31st MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KUKAN (Slovakia)
later: Ms. AL-HAMAMI (Yemen)
(Vice-Chairman)
later: Mr. KUKAN (Slovakia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 111: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued) (A/48/3 (chap. VII.C), A/48/38, A/48/98, A/48/124-S/25506, A/48/182, A/48/187-E/1993/76, A/48/279, A/48/301, A/48/338, A/48/354, A/48/359, A/48/413, A/48/513, A/48/546; A/C.3/48/L.5)

1. Ms. MUPURUA (Namibia) said that, as her Government viewed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as an ample instrument for combating gender disparity and bringing about the participation of women in development, it had acceded to it without any reservations. To ensure the widest possible awareness and support for the Convention, a comprehensive three-year national strategy had been developed to prioritize the areas of greatest need for the promotion of gender relations such as dissemination of information, education and capacity-building. The strategy had helped to accentuate gender activities in Namibia and to provide a planning framework for the future.

2. As social and economic inequity culminated in violence against women, the problem of violence could not be solved in isolation from overall development constraints. In that connection, Namibia had established a Centre for Abused Children and Mothers the primary task of which was to receive and counsel women and children in difficulties arising from molestation, abuse and rape. The assistance provided by the Centre included overnight shelter, medical treatment and remedial proceedings. She expressed her Government's appreciation for the valuable assistance rendered by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to sustain the Centre.

3. Following Namibia's attainment of independence, a Law Reform Commission had been established to review all existing legislation so as to ensure compliance with the Constitution. The Women and Law Subcommittee was examining all legislation with reference to women so as to remove all discriminatory gender legislation. Those efforts were beginning to bear fruit.

4. She welcomed the Secretary-General's report on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/48/187). Owing to the lack of facilities in rural areas, urban migration had been on the increase. In current rural Africa, many families were headed by women but some traditional practices limited women's access to land. While women were the major contributors to food production, they were often excluded from decision-making and projects aimed at improving their situation were not integrated into national development plans. The forthcoming International Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit for Social Development were relevant platforms for addressing the situation of women at the grass-roots level. Furthermore, the Fourth World Conference on Women should afford women at that level the opportunity to impart their knowledge and share their experience. International solidarity would therefore be indispensable to enable such women to participate fully in the Conference.

5. Mr. MORAN (Canada), speaking on behalf of the Governments of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, said that while the United Nations system played a key role in the development of policies to advance the status of women around

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(Mr. Moran, Canada)

the world and was active in promoting the principles of equality and of equal opportunity at the global level, it was deplorable to note that it underutilized the talents of half of the world's population. To be truly effective, the United Nations must reflect the principles which it advocated globally in its own composition and organization.

6. Experience in the three countries had shown that visible commitment from the top of any organization was a key to the success of efforts to improve the position of women in decision-making. While the recent initiatives of the Secretary-General, including the appointment of women to senior positions, were commendable, his recent report (A/48/513) demonstrated that the Organization was still far from a rate of appointment that would allow it to meet the targets set for 1995 under the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000 adopted at the Third World Conference on Women. The current rate of increase of women at the most senior levels was insufficient and the three countries would be looking for more women to break through the so-called "glass ceiling" with a rapidity that reflected the Secretary-General's commitment to the objective of parity. Further action was needed to meet existing targets. The continued low representation of women at the most senior levels called for the creation of a unit within the Secretariat dedicated to monitoring and facilitating progress on the 1995 Action Programme.

7. While the initiatives contained in the Platform for Action focused primarily on the issues of recruitment, placement and promotion and, as such, made a practical contribution to meeting the goals established for the advancement of women in the United Nations Secretariat, there were other factors involved in creating an environment conducive to attracting and retaining competent women. Sexual harassment and measures to meet the needs of workers with family responsibilities were two such factors.

8. In that regard, the administrative instruction on procedures for dealing with sexual harassment was an important step in addressing that problem; it would also be a good idea to design measures to prevent sexual harassment in addition to dealing with cases once they had occurred.

9. Another area where there was a real need for further action related to making the United Nations more responsive to the needs of workers with family responsibilities. Human resource policies that allowed for the balancing of work and family commitments would help to reduce some of the barriers to women entering into and progressing up the ladder within the Secretariat. Such policies would foster employee retention, thus maximizing the Organization's investment in its skills base.

10. The Secretary-General should give greater attention to issues such as flexible working hours, child-care arrangements, access to training and career break schemes. Since women were most often the ones called upon to shoulder the burden of managing family responsibilities, making adjustments which recognized that fact would contribute considerably to the United Nations ongoing efforts to increase the number of women in senior positions within the Secretariat. He hoped that the resolution introduced by the three countries on the promotion and advancement of women in the Secretariat would receive broad co-sponsorship.

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11. Mr. WESTERBERG (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, said that the role of women was decisive in all the issues dealt with by the forthcoming United Nations conferences. Social and economic development could not be achieved without the advancement and contribution of women nor their participation in decision-making. Human rights, to be truly universal, must include women's equal enjoyment of those rights. Population issues must be permeated by a clear gender dimension with reproductive choice at the centre of any strategy in family planning.

12. In order for the Fourth World Conference on Women to be successful, it was crucial that sufficient regular budgetary resources be allocated to it. Sufficient resources must also be provided for the Commission on the Status of Women to accomplish its role in the preparatory work as well as for the local and regional preparations. It was also important for the least developed among the developing countries to be able to participate fully in the Conference and its preparations.

13. Special attention should be given to the situation of disabled and indigenous women. Member States should support activities aimed at making such women visible in international efforts.

14. Nordic women had achieved results regarding their representation in the political decision-making forums. However, many fortresses of power were still kept by men only both in the political and, especially, in the economic field. The equal status policy in the Nordic countries was concerned with mobilizing men's participation at home. Women could not fully advance on the labour market or in decision-making unless men helped to shoulder the burden involved in child-rearing and household chores. It was also important for employers and employees to cooperate in developing specific strategies so as to reconcile working life with family life.

15. One of the major obstacles to equality between men and women world wide was sexual assault, in both private and public. The proportions of that violence had been concealed, particularly violence committed in the family which only in the past decade had been recognized as a major problem deserving priority on the national and international agendas. In that connection, the Nordic countries supported the draft declaration on violence against women soon to be adopted by the General Assembly. Its adoption would constitute a cornerstone in the necessary work of eliminating violence against women, whenever and wherever it occurred.

16. There was an urgent need to prosecute perpetrators of sexual war crimes such as those committed in the former Yugoslavia. The United Nations peace-keeping forces had an important role to play in helping to prevent rape and other abuses of women in armed conflicts, and in making known allegations of such war crimes.

17. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights was an important step forward in the promotion of and respect for the human rights of women. The Nordic countries strongly supported the appointment of a special rapporteur on violence against women.

(Mr. Westerberg, Sweden)

18. The human rights of women must be integrated into the mainstream of the United Nations system-wide activities. Women's human rights must be regularly and systematically addressed in relevant United Nations organs and mechanisms. All treaty bodies and special rapporteurs should pay increased attention to human rights abuses against women and include gender-specific information and analysis in their work. The full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was being undermined by the significant number of reservations which were contrary to international treaty law. Such reservations must not be used as a means to evade treaty obligations.

19. The United Nations must shoulder its responsibility and leadership with respect to efforts to ensure equality in its own workplace. The equal sharing of power between men and women in general in society was the main key to success in all equality-promoting work and a benefit for society as a whole. While the Secretary-General's commitment to bring the balance in policy-making positions in the Secretariat as close to parity as possible by 1995 and his initiative to deal with the problem of sexual harassment were noteworthy, renewed action was nevertheless required to increase the number of women in the Secretariat.

20. The empowering of women in all sectors of society must be given priority at both the national and international levels. No sustainable development was possible without the active participation of both men and women. The enormous potential of women in developing countries had still not been fully recognized and women still belonged to the poorest segments of their societies. Empowerment should also involve alleviating poor women's domestic workload, providing access to health and family-planning services as well as to education and promoting women's legal and political rights. Stereotypical attitudes and prejudices on men's and women's roles in society were barriers to the advancement of women all over the world.

21. Ms. DOHNAL (Austria) said that finalization of the draft declaration on the elimination of violence against women (A/C.3/48/L.5) was a major step towards enforcement of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women; it clearly affirmed violence against women as a major obstacle in their lives and also dealt with the different forms of such violence. Most importantly, it set forth the obligation of States in that area. Austria attached particular priority to protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms with regard to women, as demonstrated by its commitment to combating the pattern of violence and discrimination against them in its own society. Recalling that the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted at the recent World Conference on Human Rights, addressed the gender-specific dimension of human rights violations, she expressed confidence that the United Nations would include a gender-sensitive approach in its human rights mechanisms.

22. As a particularly horrifying aspect of the human rights violations perpetrated in the former Yugoslavia, crimes of sexual violence were being documented by the Commission of Experts created under Security Council resolution 780 (1992). She welcomed the establishment of the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former

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(Ms. Dohnal, Austria)

Yugoslavia since 1991, and assumed that sexual violence against women would form one of its primary concerns. In that connection, she also welcomed the cooperation between the Commission of Experts and women's organizations, which had experience of such matters, and emphasized the need to intensify the exchange of ideas.

23. Only careful preparation would ensure fulfilment of the expectations placed in the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. With that in mind, Austria had offered to host the European preparatory conference in Vienna in 1994. The preparatory meeting for the Platform of Action in the form of an inter-sessional working group of the Commission on the Status of Women should also be carefully prepared; relevant documentation and an exact timetable would be of help.

24. Finally, she hoped that the structural reform and redefinition of United Nations policy would further promote equality, development and peace by mainstreaming women's issues and strengthening the relevant agencies. Ensuring that it was at the forefront of a policy towards de facto equality would be a crucial test for the future United Nations system.

25. Ms. TIDSWELL (New Zealand) said that the 1993 celebrations marking the first centennial of women's suffrage in New Zealand had provided the opportunity to assess the present status of women and measures for enhancing the considerable progress already made towards attainment of true gender equality in her country. At the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, gender issues had been affirmed as a central item on the global human rights agenda. New Zealand welcomed the clear objectives set forth in the Vienna Declaration and applauded its commitment to eradicating gender discrimination.

26. Notwithstanding the highlights of 1993, women continued to be marginalized world wide and to face serious obstacles to the enjoyment of their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. As for the persistent violence against women, adoption of the draft declaration on the elimination of violence against women (A/C.3/48/L.5) would clearly signal that such behaviour was unacceptable. New Zealand supported the declaration, which it had helped to formulate, as a practical measure in eliminating a fundamental human rights abuse suffered by women. It also looked forward to the appointment of a special rapporteur on violence against women.

27. The relevant United Nations bodies and mechanisms should incorporate gender analysis into their work on a wider scale, a point which was forcefully made in the Vienna Declaration. That crucial process of mainstreaming women's issues required close cooperation between the agencies concerned. At organizational level, the United Nations should ensure that its women's human rights programme was successfully restructured. The proposed merger between UNIFEM and INSTRAW, for instance, clearly required close consideration which catered for the views of all parties and took into account the financial implications. As her delegation was not yet persuaded that a satisfactory case for merger had been made, it would carefully examine the Secretary-General's report on the subject. In so doing, it would bear in mind that any restructuring should not further reduce the resources available for activities relating to women, particularly since these were vital in the lead-up to the 1995 World Conference on Women.

(Ms. Tidswell, New Zealand)

28. The said Conference would provide an opportunity to appraise implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000. Hopefully, it would also give special attention to increasing women's participation in decision-making and produce a results-oriented platform of action. The inter-sessional working group planned for 1994 would be a useful exercise. The success of the Conference would depend on thorough preparation, in which New Zealand would be involved. The participation of regional organizations, intergovernmental agencies and non-governmental organizations would also be beneficial.

29. Finally, improving the status of women globally should be seen in the context of overall socio-economic development. In that sense, acknowledgement of women's skills and capabilities was critical to the broader goals of the United Nations.

30. Ms. Al-Hamami (Yemen), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

31. Mrs. ESCHENKO (Ukraine) said that one of the most important results of the World Conference on Human Rights was recognition of the rights of women as an inalienable part of human rights and that discrimination and violence directed against women constituted human-rights violations. Progress made with regard to the rights of women at the Conference had, to a large extent, been due to the efforts of women's non-governmental organizations. Her delegation supported Commission on the Status of Women resolution 37/7 on preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women and urged the States that had not yet done so to establish national committees speedily for that purpose. Ukraine had set up such a committee in March 1993 and welcomed the holding of the European Regional Preparatory Meeting in October 1994 with broad participation of governmental and non-governmental organizations.

32. Her delegation shared the general concern expressed about violence against women, particularly during armed conflicts, and endorsed the adoption of Commission on Human Rights resolution 1993/46, which condemned all acts of violence and violations of human rights directed specifically against women and decided to consider the appointment of a special rapporteur on violence against women. She hoped that at its current session the General Assembly would adopt the draft declaration on violence against women.

33. In Ukraine, as in other countries with transitional economies, the prospects for solving the problems of women were very unfavourable. Most of those problems were the results of policies under the previous government and the centralized economy. Her country's low birth rate was to a large extent caused by the large number of women employed in production, an undeveloped social welfare infrastructure and social and economic instability.

34. In July 1992, her Government had drawn up a long-term policy programme to enhance the status of women, assist families, and improve the health of mothers and children. The programme provided for a number of specific measures aimed at, inter alia, organizing women's work schedules, ensuring social protection, and enabling women to adapt during the transition to a market economy. That programme and the State family-planning programme were based on provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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(Mrs. Eschenko, Ukraine)

and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Implementation of those two programmes, however, was being delayed because of the limited financial and material resources available for that purpose.

35. In the search for new conceptual approaches to solving the problems of women, Ukraine sought to make use of experience acquired in the field of social protection of women by adapting it to new economic conditions and at the same time believed that excessive State assistance had a negative effect on recipients. Her country therefore considered it very important at the current time to take punctual measures to protect vulnerable groups of women and also promote entrepreneurship among women in order to involve them in the development process and the political life of the State. Ukraine was particularly interested in the preparations for the Fourth World Conference and subsequent cooperation with international organizations in ensuring the rights of women.

36. Mrs. COMAROSCHI (Romania) said that the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies showed internationally the challenges resulting from the political changes and the need to find optimum methods of implementing United Nations strategies for eliminating discrimination against women. Romania was committed to participating in all the designs for tackling the problems relating to women's advancement and human rights. However, despite the instruments for respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, women had not yet achieved equal status in society. Concerted efforts were therefore needed to ensure greater collaboration between the United Nations and outside bodies. Non-governmental organizations could contribute towards international action intended to eliminate all traditional forms of discrimination.

37. The prerequisites needed for the equal socio-economic development of women were access to education, professional training and employment, which were a first step towards women exercising their civil and political rights, participating in decision-making and sharing communal responsibilities. In the broader context, however, human rights and fundamental freedoms, of which women's rights were part, could be guaranteed only by building democracy, the rule of law, economic development and a stable political climate.

38. In Romania, the post-1989 transition period had generated a social crisis in all sectors of society; the status of women had been inevitably affected, both socially and economically. None the less, the legal basis for ensuring the promotion of equal opportunities for women did exist, and Romania's accession to various international human rights instruments had led to the repeal, amendment and adoption of laws. Its Constitution also safeguarded equal rights for all citizens, without discrimination. Even so, however, women's rights were not always protected and observed, although dialogue with trade unions and non-governmental organizations had been instituted with a view to enhancing the participation of women at all levels of society. In 1990, Romania had also withdrawn its reservation to article 29, paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which it had ratified in 1982.

39. Despite the progress made in the advancement of women, additional effort was still required to implement the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies; the 1995 World Conference on Women should provide impetus in that sense. Finally, her

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(Mrs. Comaroschi, Romania)

delegation reaffirmed its support for the constant initiatives aimed to enhance the advancement, value and dignity of women.

40. Mr. ALBIN (Mexico), speaking also on behalf of Colombia and Venezuela, stressed the urgent need for the Organization to step up its efforts to reverse the effects of structural adjustments in the social sectors of most developing countries. One of the most important achievements of the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights was recognition of the rights of women as an inalienable and integral part of universal human rights. Implementation of national legislation and international human rights instruments, however, had still not led to greater opportunities for women. Many problems, including the growth of extreme poverty, increased violence against women, their limited participation in decision-making processes and the emergency situation of women in armed conflicts, must be analysed and remedied. The Vienna Conference had underscored the importance of eliminating violence and all forms of harassment against women. The draft declaration on violence against women, to be adopted at the current session of the General Assembly, would be an important contribution for dealing with that problem.

41. The Fourth World Conference on Women would be an opportunity to create real solutions to the problems confronting women. It was a matter of concern that many countries had still not designated national committees to carry out preparations for the Conference. States which had not yet done so should take immediate steps to mobilize support for the Conference. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies should be the starting-point for action and setting up mechanisms to achieve better results. Implementation of the Strategies was still the main objective in promoting the advancement of women. The report on that subject to be submitted to the Conference should analyse in depth and explain why there had been only partial progress and, in some respects, movement backward. The stepped-up implementation of the Strategies was closely linked to the new concept of the roles to be played by men and women in society. In that connection, equality between men and women must be based on human dignity.

42. The Platform for Action to be adopted at the Fourth World Conference should include innovative proposals that would have a positive impact on governmental policies and the activities of non-governmental organizations. The Governments of Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela were prepared to put forward specific proposals concerning that document. Dissemination of information on the Conference should have the support of all relevant United Nations bodies, Governments and non-governmental organizations. There was a need to design an information campaign with activities involving all sectors of society. The non-governmental organizations dealing with women's questions should participate in the preparatory process in the same way as they would for the International Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit for Social Development.

43. Special consideration should be given to the need for effective coordination between the various United Nations bodies in that field. In the light of the results achieved at the Beijing Conference, a careful review of existing structures should be carried out in order to strengthen inter-institutional coordination.

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(Mr. Albin, Mexico)

44. Lastly, it was regrettable that the report of the Secretary-General on the proposal to merge INSTRAW and UNIFEM had not been submitted on time for consideration by the Committee. That was a delicate matter which required careful analysis. The General Assembly should have all the information necessary for considering the merits of the proposal before taking a definitive decision.

45. Mr. LINDGRAVEN ALVES (Brazil) said that as the end of the century approached, Governments and societies had to define ways to achieve the three main objectives of the Nairobi Conference on Women: equality, development and peace. The Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 would provide an opportunity to appraise past accomplishments and set new priorities.

46. It was very difficult to achieve real change and progress in social and economic sectors in an unstable, unfair and violent context. Despite the advancements women had achieved over the past two decades, the progressive deterioration of international economic relations had hindered their economic and social development. Notwithstanding economic restraints, the strengthening of democratic institutions in Brazil had enabled women there gradually to overcome certain cultural prejudices and achieve greater participation in social, economic and legal fields. Women's organizations had expanded over the past 20 years and were particularly active in the legal sphere.

47. His delegation had played an active role in preparing the draft declaration on the elimination of violence against women and viewed its adoption by the General Assembly as an important step in the promotion and protection of women's rights internationally. Violence against women was one of the gravest violations of human rights and a serious obstacle to the complete integration of women in society. His delegation strongly supported the proposal that the Commission on Human Rights should establish a special rapporteur to deal specifically with the problem of violence against women. Brazil had been a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women since 1984 and had submitted a proposal for the withdrawal of all reservations to the Convention to its Parliament.

48. His Government had established a national committee to coordinate activities for the Fourth World Conference on Women, prepare a national report for the Conference and mobilize public opinion on women's issues throughout the country. As for previous world conferences, and in preparation of the World Conference on Population and Development in 1994, his Government would continue to work in close cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

49. Mr. Kukan (Slovakia) resumed the Chair.

50. Mrs. SCHEMBRI ORLAND (Malta) noted that most women were still victims of abuse, rape, domestic and sexual violence and gender discrimination simply because they were women. Gender issues needed constant assessment and investigation. At the Fourth World Conference on Women, each member State would address the key themes of equality, development and peace and their relevance within national policy. That Conference should examine plans of action in light of their effectiveness within a larger perspective of social, political and economic dynamics.

(Mrs. Schembri Orland, Malta)

51. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was a human rights document that manifested an initial commitment of the ratifying State and strengthened democratic institutions. While it was desirable to attract ratification of the Convention, the reservations made by a number of States should be re-examined, and ways should be found to rechannel States' commitment to equality, even in those areas. The Convention should be linked to other important human rights documents, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

52. Countries should be assisted in the formulation of national policies on women. National machineries, set up to incorporate those policies into national development plans, should have an administrative status senior enough to allow them to press for reforms and to cope with the new problems facing women, inter alia, economic decline and poverty, AIDS, environmental and political participation, trafficking in women and media exploitation. National and international financing policies should be formulated with regard to their impact on women and on their living standards and should address demographic issues and shifts in the nuclear family producing single-parent families headed by women. Partnership between women and men in development was essential in formulating national policies.

53. Violence against women should be a central focus of the 1995 Conference. Her delegation endorsed the draft declaration on the elimination of violence against women. An important consideration was criminalization of violent conduct, such as domestic violence which was not always treated as a crime. Criminalization should be accompanied by an improvement of the status and rights of the victim in criminal law. In that respect, the role of the media was crucial as a primary activator of social change. In Malta, the problem of domestic violence had only recently been the focus of public debate and the Government was tackling that issue with a multidisciplinary approach. In pursuing the objective to create a caring society, her Government had initiated improved procedures and structures for the delivery of key social services. Victims of domestic violence, teenage mothers and single parents would be among those to benefit from such measures.

54. While progress had been made since the First World Conference on Women, the persistence of acts of violence against women world wide was a tragic paradox which negated fundamental human rights. The development of a society based on a partnership of men and women, equal in dignity, should be the ultimate goal.

55. Mr. RATUNACEVA (Fiji) said that women played a significant role in his country's economy, at the subsistence level and in the manufacturing and service sectors. Their participation in the labour force was increasing steadily owing to wider employment opportunities, the increased number of women with educational qualifications and economic necessity. Between 1976 and 1986, the number of women in the "economically active" category and among the self-employed had grown. Although more women were entering the labour force, most were in the primary sector and lower occupational levels. In the past 10 years, women had slowly attained administrative and managerial positions in the professional and technical fields. The slow rate of progress was attributed to women's choice of traditional "female" occupations, stiff competition from

(Mr. Ratunaceva, Fiji)

equally well-qualified males, stringent selection criteria, and prevailing social attitudes favouring males for recruitment and promotion.

56. Most of the female labour force was engaged in the informal sector and not covered by labour regulations. The Government sought to encourage women's participation in "mainstream" economic activities and improve their access to services which would increase their productivity. More resources would be devoted to technical and vocational education to improve their occupational skills.

57. Women's health had vastly improved over the years in Fiji and the survival rate and life expectancy for women were higher than those for men. The national health policy was geared towards ensuring maternal health. The maternal and child health services were an integral part of the primary and preventive health-care programme and focused specifically on women's reproductive and nurturing roles. His country's family-planning programme had also helped improve the lives of women. Although Fiji had not acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, it had, nevertheless, implemented many of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies.

58. Mrs. KOURULA (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that her office placed high priority on ensuring that its protection and assistance activities reached refugee women, who made up the majority of the adult refugee population and many of whom were single heads of families. Four years earlier UNHCR had initiated a process aimed at ensuring that the specific needs of refugee women were taken into account at all stages of the Office's involvement. The process integrated a series of activities including development of a clear policy framework, drafting of operational guidelines, strategic placement of specialized staff, gender-training programmes for staff, legal advocacy and cooperation with other United Nations organizations.

59. The most difficult stage of ensuring a gender focus in UNHCR interventions was the emergency phase, where large numbers of refugees had crossed a border and were in desperate need of protection and basic assistance. The establishment of a support infrastructure was a primary concern. The Office had taken steps to improve gender-sensitive emergency response to meet the specific needs of refugee women. Stand-by arrangements had been instituted to ensure rapid mobilization of social-services officers at the early stages of an emergency. Once a refugee situation stabilized, UNHCR continued to provide basic services and encouraged literacy and skills training, trauma counselling, leadership and legal awareness training for women.

60. When repatriating refugees, UNHCR had endeavoured to ensure that women's specific situation was addressed in planning and coordination with development agencies. UNHCR had worked together with other United Nations bodies in Central America and Cambodia in planning the reintegration of uprooted women. As women faced particular problems when applying for refugee status, UNHCR was training officials, responsible for determination procedures, to ensure that women had access to a fair interview process that took into account cross-cultural factors. Authorities of resettlement countries were made fully aware of

(Mrs. Kourula)

specific factors which might have a bearing in the determination of a women's application for refugee status.

61. Refugee women were especially vulnerable to exploitation and sexual violence. Such widely publicized horrors, as those in former Yugoslavia, went virtually unnoticed in other parts of the world. UNHCR had actively addressed those abuses, documenting them and calling for remedial action. UNHCR's Executive Committee had called on States to adopt concrete measures to prevent sexual violence and define specific remedial activities. UNHCR had also participated in other forums to raise awareness of the situation of refugee women. It was essential that the concerns of uprooted women should be included in the agenda of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women.

62. Ms. BREINES (UNESCO) said that women continued to be a priority target group of UNESCO, together with the least developed countries and Africa. UNESCO was actively involved in promoting equality between women and men by giving top priority to basic education on literacy for girls and women, by promoting women's access to vocational training and scientific and technical education, by involving women in the process of democratization and development and by helping to universalize women's rights and to combat violence against women.

63. As UNESCO's budget was limited, some of its activities were made possible through its partnership with other international or national bodies. However, the share of UNESCO's regular budget allocated to women's specific activities had substantially increased. For many years, UNESCO had pursued a dual approach to gender-related issues which involved specific women's projects and programmes, and integrated women's needs into all planning implementation and evaluation. The current underutilization of women's skills and potential was a waste of human resources, detrimental to the individual and to the development of society. It was vital for full use to be made of women's experience and expertise in meeting major world challenges.

64. The Fourth World Conference on Women would provide an opportunity to evaluate past achievements and improve UNESCO's activities. UNESCO appreciated the strategy of the Secretary-General of the Conference, Ms. Mongella, which stressed the need to look forward and draw strength from diversity. UNESCO would bring to the 1995 Conference data, description and analysis of the situation of women in different parts of the world in the areas of education, science, culture and development. The eradication of illiteracy among girls and women required long-term commitment by international organizations, Governments and professionals, and was the single most effective factor for change towards development with a human face. Literacy was a vital step towards full participation in the democratic process and in decision-making.

65. UNESCO estimated that, if current trends continued, the number of illiterates would fall very little during the 1990s. There would be some progress in East Asia, and to a lesser degree in Latin America and the Caribbean. UNESCO continued to promote regional educational programmes for the eradication of illiteracy and had launched new projects in many parts of the world. Yet, in spite of its priority status, the education of girls and women still lagged behind that of boys and men in most countries. The current

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(Ms. Breines, UNESCO)

situation challenged the notion of justice and development and, ultimately, peace. Real security required a well-educated world population.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.