

UNITED NATIONS  
**General Assembly**  
FIFTY-FIRST SESSION  
*Official Records*

THIRD COMMITTEE  
15th meeting  
held on  
Monday, 28 October 1996  
at 10 a.m.  
New York

---

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 15th MEETING

Chairman: Mrs. ESPINOSA (Mexico)  
later: Mr. TESSEMA (Ethiopia)  
(Vice-Chairman)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 103: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued)\*

AGENDA ITEM 104: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE  
ON WOMEN (continued)\*

---

\* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

---

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of the publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-794, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL  
A/C.3/51/SR.15  
19 December 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 103: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued) (A/51/3 (Parts I and II), A/51/38, 90, 180, 210, 277 and Corr.1), 304 and Corr.1, 309, 325 and 391; and A/50/509 and Add.1)

AGENDA ITEM 104: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN (continued) (A/51/90, 210 and 322)

1. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to a background report issued by the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "The advancement of women through and in the programmes of the United Nations system: What happens after the Fourth World Conference on Women?" (A/50/509 and Add.1).

2. Ms. RUSSELL (Barbados) said that her Government was deeply committed to women's equality. Since the Beijing Conference, the Barbados Bureau of Women's Affairs had been actively involved with ministries, major corporations, and private sector and non-governmental organizations in implementing the relevant sections of the National Strategic Plan of Action and the policy and initiative section on the strengthening of family life and the status of women. The Bureau had also begun the process of updating the national policy statement on women, incorporating government policies in order to ensure the equality of women in all spheres of life in Barbados. As part of its efforts to implement the recommendations of the recent United Nations development conferences, the Bureau had been working with all relevant government bodies in coordinating a national plan of action in which gender awareness was central to all components. In that connection, she expressed appreciation to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for its direction and guidance.

3. In executing its programmes for women, Barbados would be particularly mindful of the critical role played by women in sustainable development. She joined other delegations in underscoring the importance of women in food production and in the educational sector and noted the useful role being played by FAO and UNESCO in those areas. Barbados also subscribed to the views expressed earlier in the year in the Commission on the Status of Women on the need for poverty eradication and combating the feminization of poverty.

4. Her country had been working closely at the subregional level in Caribbean Community programmes for the advancement of women. At a recent meeting, Barbados had strongly supported a recommendation to develop an information kit for promoting gender awareness, which would be extremely useful to new ministries, administrative heads and personnel dealing with women's affairs. Providing such information and evaluating gender awareness were crucial for ensuring continuity in promoting equality between men and women.

5. In cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Bureau of Women's Affairs had actively participated in the Caribbean Community Regional Plan of Action, which was an important follow-up to the Beijing Conference and would be finalized later that month. Non-governmental organizations in Barbados and the region had traditionally played a vital role in the women's movement. The Caribbean Women's Association

had held a biannual conference in Barbados in April 1996, charting a regional plan of action for women's non-governmental organizations. Prominent parliamentarians, women's rights activists and non-governmental organizations had recently taken part in a rally in Barbados focusing on the issues of poverty, women's self-esteem and violence against women. The UNIFEM office in Barbados had recently lauded the progress made by the country in enacting legislation relating to social justice for women. The Family Law and the Domestic Violence Act had been identified as an important step in safeguarding the rights of women and, together with related policies to advance equality and education, should pave the way for the further progress by women in all sectors of society.

6. Her country commended the work accomplished by UNIFEM and was especially grateful to the Barbados office, which had provided useful guidance and technical assistance to the women's movement, particularly in programmes aimed at enhancing gender awareness and strategies to ensure the economic and social empowerment of women. She also expressed her country Government's support for the stupendous work by the United Nations in promoting the advancement of women and underscored the need to ensure adequate resources for the Division for the Advancement of Women to enable it to carry out effectively the Beijing Platform for Action. In view of the possible adverse effects of global trends such as trade liberalization and rapid technological change, the need for continued United Nations action in the fight for women's equality was greater than ever.

7. Mr. KIMBERG (Denmark) said that his country attached the highest importance to the full implementation of the commitments undertaken at the Beijing Conference. In April 1996, his Government had submitted to Parliament an action plan for the national and international follow-up to the Platform for Action. The plan focused on mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and all planning. As a pilot project, all bills within the purview of the Ministry of Labour would be assessed from a gender perspective. The assessment would then be included in the comments on the bills presented to parliament. Experience would determine whether such a gender-impact assessment should be extended to other areas. At least every second year, municipal and county authorities would report on the equality status of their employees. Central government institutions had to complete the drafting of action plans for equality by the end of 1996. The educational system in Denmark endeavoured to ensure equal opportunities for both girls and boys. The concept of gender equality would be further strengthened in relevant legislation and school curricula, and training centres and universities.

8. In order to eliminate the gender-segregated labour market, training programmes and introductory vocational courses had been introduced for women in traditionally male-dominated areas and for men in traditionally female-dominated areas. One of the most important ways to promote equal opportunities for men and women was to enhance the relationship between family life and working life. A new campaign had been launched to make leave-of-absence schemes for child care more attractive to men. The Government was striving to change attitudes on the part of employers and employees through campaigns explaining legal provisions of importance to families with children.

9. In order to prevent double discrimination against foreign women and women belonging to ethnic minorities, his Government addressed problems concerning those women's legal status and integration into Danish society. The action plan also dealt with Danish policy on development cooperation and confirmed the overall objective of gender-specific poverty eradication, focusing on the different roles and needs of men and women. The recommendations in the Beijing Platform for Action would be integrated into Denmark's development cooperation by endeavouring to foster respect for human rights through a political dialogue with recipient countries and through specific projects. Increased emphasis would be given to incorporating women's human rights in such a dialogue, focusing on equal rights and non-discrimination, through, *inter alia*, ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

10. With regard to violence against women, the Danish Government had focused specifically on female genital mutilation and had hosted an international seminar on that question in 1995. As a result of the seminar, guidelines for the prevention of female genital mutilation through development assistance had been laid down and published. The Equal Status Council and the Committee on International Equality Affairs would be closely monitoring Denmark's implementation of the Beijing commitments. The Government would submit a further progress report on that question to Parliament in the next two years.

11. Mr. YUSOF (Singapore) said that, as a small country with no natural resources, Singapore had to tap into the global economic network and develop its human resources to their fullest extent. Accordingly, the total well-being of society in general could be enhanced only by developing the full potential of women. The globalization of trade and finance had brought direct foreign investment and expanded the job opportunities, enabling women to join the workforce and assume decision-making positions. The challenge lay in seizing the opportunities for income and employment expansion in order to promote equitable development and gender equality.

12. His Government was committed to the fullest development of all citizens for their own empowerment. Women in Singapore were given equal access to education, training and health-care services. The Government advocated an equal-opportunity policy for employment of both men and women in all sectors based on the principle of democracy. Education was one of the most important means to give women the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. The equal-opportunity policy had ensured virtually equal enrolment of males and females in school. Even in tertiary institutions, 43 per cent of the students were female, and more female students were entering disciplines previously dominated by men. Women represented about 40 per cent of Singapore's workforce. The Government had implemented various schemes and measures to support women's economic participation, including child-care facilities, subsidy schemes, special tax benefits and programmes for working mothers. Women in Singapore had equal access to nutrition, education and health programmes. The country's low infant-mortality and maternal-mortality rates were the result of increased budgetary allocations to primary health care and the preventive aspects of reproductive health. There were also community-based programmes to meet the special needs of elderly women. The Women's Charter, a landmark piece of legislation introduced in 1961, provided a

comprehensive legal basis to protect the rights of women and girls in areas ranging from domestic violence, sexual and physical offences against women, exploitation of women and girls, and equality between husbands and wives. Singapore was determined to make further progress in its efforts to ensure gender equality.

13. Ms. BAHREMANI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that women's enjoyment of all human rights was an essential prerequisite for the development of society. The advancement of women should be addressed at three integrated levels: the family, society and the State. There was a need to ensure respect for each country's moral, cultural and religious values, including respect for the family, which was the basic unit of society. As a Muslim woman, she felt that it was her responsibility to speak out against those who claimed that religions based on divine revelation, in particular Islam, provided no status for women. That was far from the truth. Fourteen centuries earlier, when women had had neither social nor human standing in the world, Islam had recognized the exalted status and human equality of women. On the basis of that notion, women were encouraged to participate in all spheres of social, economic and political life.

14. Since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, her country had endeavoured to improve the status of women in all areas. In addition to their role in the family, they were participating vigorously in all economic, social and political activities, serving as members of Parliament, advisers and under-secretaries to the President and ministers. The Women's Council, a policy-making body for women's issues, had been established to enhance the status of women.

15. Women were active in art, cultural activities, journalism, the film industry, the mass media and higher education. Health services had been greatly expanded and, as a result, women's life expectancy had increased to 65 years, and childbirth-related mortality had been reduced to 45 per 100,000. The civil code and the administrative regulations were currently under review in order to create an environment more conducive to the empowerment of women. In implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Islamic Republic of Iran had launched comprehensive programmes to promote women's rights and expand their opportunities. Women's empowerment at the national, regional and global level required a multidimensional approach in the cultural, economic, political and social fields. One of the problems facing women striving for empowerment was the attempt by some to impose on others a specific ideology, devoid of spirituality and alien to human nature, thus undermining the existing cultural diversity of mankind. There was a need to create a vision for the future and work towards building a more supportive environment for the realization of women's rights and a world in which women enjoyed equal access to the highest political and economic opportunities.

16. Ms. KIDRON (Israel) said her delegation shared the view that the two agenda items under consideration should be taken up together in the future. During the past year, Israeli non-governmental organizations and various government offices had conducted numerous meetings bringing the message of Beijing to a wider spectrum of audiences. The Committee of Women's Organizations had established working groups to evaluate the situation in Israel with regard to women and poverty, women and health, and women and the environment. Within the next two months, the working groups would present the results of their surveys and

/...

recommendations on future steps to be taken in each area. The media should be utilized to raise public awareness of women's rights and issues. Since the Beijing Conference, Israeli newspapers, television and radio had become more involved with women's issues, and extensive coverage was given to cases of violence against women. Frequent appearances in the media by women political and business leaders and experts in various fields would create role models for younger women.

17. Most Israeli women served in the army, were part of the workforce and enjoyed an advanced system of maternity leave and affordable daycare. Israel's legislation promoting equality of men and women was among the most advanced in the world. Together with women's non-governmental organizations, her Government was fully committed to achieving the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. For example, the Committee on the Status of Women in the Israeli Parliament had the full cooperation of all the different parties and was in constant contact with various women's non-governmental organizations and women from the academic, financial and business worlds. Since the Committee's establishment in 1992, women's issues had been increasingly on the Parliament's agenda. That had resulted in affirmative action legislation and the recent launching of a campaign by the Prime Minister aimed at eliminating domestic violence.

18. Israel was sparing no effort to reach the goal of total equality for women in all spheres of life and shared its experience in that regard with other countries through programmes that trained women in ways to achieve equality and improve their lives.

19. Mr. AGGREY (Ghana) said that change was needed in many issues affecting women's lives, including the feminization of poverty, discrimination, disease, deeply entrenched traditions, practices and attitudes that perpetuated inequality and subordination, violence and sexual exploitation, and marginalization. The Beijing Platform for Action had made a bold attempt to address all those problems and indicate strategies and benchmarks for the achievement of certain objectives. At the national level, Governments bore primary responsibility for implementation of the Platform. His delegation welcomed plans to establish or improve the effectiveness of national machinery for the advancement of women at the highest political level. His country had made progress in implementing some objectives. For example, the Platform for Action had been translated into the major local languages in order to ensure wider dissemination. Legal practitioners and law enforcement agencies had been sensitized in their handling of cases of violence against women, and watchdog committees had been established to monitor such violence. Policies and programmes were analysed from a gender perspective, and the momentum of change was visible everywhere.

20. At the regional level, the Economic Commission for Africa played a leading role in assisting Member States in their implementation of the Platform, focusing human and financial resources on enhancing women's political leadership role and economic empowerment and promoting their legal and human rights. His delegation appreciated the important role of non-governmental organizations in the preparation and implementation of the Platform for Action, and the pressure they were able to bring to bear on Governments.

21. In order for the United Nations to assume the leadership role expected of it in implementing, monitoring and assessing the outcome of the Conference, an integrated approach to mainstreaming a gender perspective in all its policies and programmes would have to be adopted. Some encouraging initiatives had been put in place. His delegation considered the concept of "mainstreaming" as simply a matter of adopting policies and programmes designed and evaluated in terms of the benefits for women. The United Nations system must set a good example by, for example, improving the status of women in the Secretariat. While gains had been made in recent years with regard to gender equality in the distribution of posts at all levels, the percentage of women in policy and decision-making roles remained very low. His delegation urged the Secretary-General to persist in the full implementation of his Strategic Plan of Action for the improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat 1995 to 2000, despite the financial crisis, and also called upon Member States to assist the Secretariat in that endeavour.

22. His delegation had been interested to note that the Administrative Committee on Coordination had set up an Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality under the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Gender Issues. In his delegation's view, the work of the Committee should extend beyond Headquarters to operational and field level activities, and should deal with gender issues in developed as well as in developing countries. He therefore urged the Secretary-General to reconsider the appointment of the Special Adviser on a full-time basis, with supervisory responsibilities for the work of the Division for the Advancement of Women. He applauded the excellent work done by the Commission on the Status of Women. However, in order to achieve results, the resources allocated to gender mainstreaming and women-targeted activities should match the scale of the programmes and goals intended to benefit women all over the world.

23. Mr. Tessema (Ethiopia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

24. Mr. KAMARA (Sierra Leone) said that sociocultural practices and religious beliefs had created a disparity between the rights and opportunities accorded men and women, in particular in the developing countries. As a result, women did not participate fully in the development process. Yet it was now widely recognized that the empowerment of women was a critical factor in the eradication of poverty. Education must be a priority, for development studies had shown that literacy enhanced women's capacity to deal with health, economic and other issues affecting the well-being of their families. Another crucial area was reproductive health. Women the world over experienced complications during pregnancy and childbirth, while some faced the dangers of backstreet abortions.

25. The recent major United Nations conferences on social questions, in particular the Fourth World Conference on Women, had represented a major step forward in the field of women's rights, but much remained to be done. Governments must bear the primary responsibility for implementing the commitments made at those conferences, with the United Nations providing support for initiatives at the national level.

26. Sierra Leone had recently emerged from 30 years of one-party rule and military dictatorship. The new, democratically elected Government was committed to the goals of social and economic development and the advancement of women. To that end, it had established a Ministry for Gender and Children's Affairs. The Ministry of Health had expanded training of medical personnel and was building new health centres with the aim of making primary health-care services available to approximately 70 per cent of the population. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) had made an important contribution to the reduction of maternal mortality by increasing the provision of contraception and raising awareness of the link between family planning and development. In addition, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had carried out valuable work in the field of immunization.

27. Regrettably, armed groups were still active in some regions of the country and, as a result, development programmes were restricted to the capital, the surrounding area and the provincial capitals. Negotiations between the Government and the rebel groups were continuing. With an end to the conflict in sight, he appealed to the bodies of the United Nations system and to intergovernmental organizations to assist his country in the process of reconstruction.

28. Mrs. EDWARDS (Marshall Islands) said that, like their counterparts in other developing countries, the women of the Marshall Islands lacked opportunities in the fields of education and employment and were underrepresented in local and national politics, though slow but positive gains were being made. Her Government recognized that the advancement of women must be a central element of all development strategies. Education was crucial, enabling women both to gain access to employment and to manage more efficiently the fruits of their efforts, in the interest of family, community and national development.

29. Her Government was committed to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. Programmes had already been initiated in the fields of vocational training and family planning, while women and girls in the outer islands were being helped to market the goods they produced overseas and to expand their traditional skills through the application of environmentally sound technology.

30. Many women and girls in the Marshall Islands had been exposed to radiation, and an increasing number were dying of cancer. She appealed to the international community to recognize their plight and to provide the technical assistance her country needed to deal with the problem of contamination. She welcomed the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and applauded those countries which had ratified it. Only when the interrelationship between disarmament, environment, health and human rights was universally recognized would the peoples of the world be assured of a safe future.

31. Ms. ESHMAMBETOYA (Kyrgyzstan) said that, in accordance with the commitments it had made at the Beijing Conference, her Government had created a State commission on women and the family which would formulate a national strategy for the advancement of women, taking the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action as its base. The Commission was cooperating actively with a number of United Nations specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations.

32. Her Government recognized the importance of enhancing women's participation in political life. Nearly one fifth of government ministers were women, significantly higher than the global average, and her Government aimed to ensure that by the year 2000 40 per cent of decision-making posts were occupied by women.

33. Unemployment among women was the most severe social problem facing Kyrgyzstan. Despite her Government's efforts, women still accounted for almost 60 per cent of the jobless total, with young women being particularly hard hit. In response to the crisis, her Government had launched job-creation schemes and was supporting entrepreneurial activities by women. The high levels of unemployment, together with rising prices and cutbacks in social assistance programmes which had accompanied the transition to a market economy, had led to a drop in the birth rate. Nevertheless, the infant mortality rate remained among the highest in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, a regrettable statistic.

34. Discrimination against women often began in childhood, with girls being denied equal access to health care and education. In Kyrgyzstan, young women were already well represented in both secondary and higher education, and her Government had recently launched a programme aimed at ensuring that all girls received secondary schooling. In Kyrgyzstan, 1996 had been declared national women's year. An international women's conference would shortly be held in the capital, Bishkek, to evaluate the achievements of the previous 12 months. As the national women's year was drawing to an end, it was hoped that 1996 would mark the dawn of a new era of equality between men and women.

35. Mr. RI Song Il (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the advancement of women and social and economic progress went hand in hand and that neither could be achieved without the other. Thus, all efforts to promote women's rights must first address the problems of poverty, disease and illiteracy. The difficulties faced by women in the developing nations were especially acute and would be overcome only when those countries enjoyed equal access to the global market.

36. At the national level, Governments must pass equal-opportunity legislation and create the social conditions necessary to enable women to contribute fully to all areas of life. The campaign for women's emancipation had been an integral part of his country's struggle for independence. The first equal-opportunity laws had been enacted in 1946. Today, women continued to play an active role in politics. Some 20 per cent of the deputies of the Supreme People's Assembly were women. The socialist system was especially conducive to the advancement of women. Universal child care for pre-school children, entirely funded by the State, meant that women were free to pursue independent lives.

37. The issue of the thousands of "comfort women" abused by Japanese soldiers during the Second World War had yet to be satisfactorily addressed. He urged the Japanese Government to accept responsibility for that atrocity and to provide adequate compensation for the victims.

38. Mr. TURNQUEST (Bahamas), speaking on behalf of the 13 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) expressed concern that funding for women's programmes had increased only slightly at the national and international levels and, in some instances, had actually decreased. Innovative ways to provide resources for programmes or to maintain current levels of funding should be sought.

39. Within the framework of follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, additional steps must be taken to enhance the capacities of the Division for the Advancement of Women, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the International Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the Office of the Focal Point for Women in the Secretariat. The freeze on recruitment should not be used as an excuse for inaction. CARICOM welcomed the establishment of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality and looked forward to learning about the outcome of its recent meetings. The Third Committee should address lacunae and ensure that there was no duplication in implementing the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women for the period 1996-2001.

40. At the national level, greater efforts must be made to formulate national action plans, as recommended by the Beijing Conference, and to submit them in a timely manner to the Secretariat. The model plan which had been formulated at the recent subregional conference of senior governmental experts, held in Bucharest, could be useful in that connection.

41. CARICOM welcomed the participation of non-governmental organizations in the follow-up to the Beijing Conference through the holding of dialogues and workshops and active participation in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women. It also welcomed the ongoing dialogue between member States and non-governmental organizations on how the participation of the latter could be made even more effective.

42. In October 1995, the Caribbean Community had held a meeting to follow up the Beijing Conference and formulated a subregional plan of action. Priorities in that plan included poverty reduction and the economic empowerment of women; women's health; the prevention of violence against women; the political empowerment of women; disaster prevention and preparedness; and the strengthening of national machinery. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had been disseminated widely in government agencies of the Caribbean countries and the community at large. The CARICOM Governments had also sponsored workshops and seminars.

43. Senior cabinet ministers and national entities for women's affairs were responsible for women's issues. Caribbean women had free access to high-level posts in both the public and private sectors. The CARICOM countries were grateful to the secretariats of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Caribbean Development Cooperation Committee (CDCC), UNIFEM, the Organization of American States, the Commonwealth and CARICOM for supporting their follow-up activities.

44. CARICOM hailed the achievement of an overall rate of 35.2 per cent in posts subject to geographical distribution in the Secretariat. Greater efforts must

/...

be made, however, in order to attain the target of a 25 per cent participation rate of women at the decision-making level and the overall target of 50 per cent. As they had already indicated during the past two sessions of the General Assembly, the CARICOM countries were concerned about the low level of representation of CARICOM women in the Secretariat. They hoped that that situation would be remedied and that CARICOM women already in the Secretariat would be promoted to senior-level posts.

45. CARICOM strongly supported the holding of an additional session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 1997 in order to deal with the backlog of periodic reports. Resources should be provided for a session of the open-ended in-session working group on the optional protocol to be convened in parallel with the forty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women. In that connection, the Chairman of the Third Committee might wish to transmit a letter to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee, conveying the Third Committee's strong desire that those meetings should take place. It was not too early to begin organizing discussions, workshops and seminars, at both the national and international levels, in preparation for the deliberations of the Commission on the Status of Women in 1997.

46. Ms. AL-AWADI (Kuwait) said that the Kuwaiti Constitution guaranteed women the right to work and to do the work of their choice. In 1996, women represented nearly 30 per cent of the workforce. However, the role of women in development and in serving society was not restricted to paid employment, but included social and voluntary services.

47. The Constitution affirmed the equality of men and women with regard to rights and responsibilities, and provided women with legal guarantees of their right to education and work. It was, however, left up to local legislative bodies to make arrangements appropriate to prevailing circumstances. Since the mid-1970s, development plans had stressed the active role of women in development and their participation in the workforce in all social and economic spheres. The social and economic development plan for the years 1995-1996 to 1999-2000 had contained a number of social development policies which stressed that caring for the family was the responsibility of both parents, with special emphasis on the importance of the role played by women as mothers.

48. During the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, Kuwaiti women had been subjected to a number of abuses, which had caused psychological and social problems. These problems had persisted after liberation for women whose husbands had either been killed or who continued to be detained in Iraqi prisons, and the situation was exacerbated by Iraqi procrastination.

49. Mr. AL-DOSARI (Bahrain) said that his country believed that the participation of women in all aspects of social life, in accordance with the Islamic Shariah as it related to the dignity and welfare of women, was basic to the achievement of development. The elimination of poverty and backwardness and the achievement of economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice required the participation of women in the overall development process.

50. Bahrain had endeavoured to achieve such participation by means of its long- and short-term plans in the fields of education, health, labour, social affairs, housing, information, development and industry. The active role of women in social and economic development activities and projects over the past three decades had increased greatly. There had been close cooperation between the governmental and non-governmental sectors in preparing, financing and participating in development, welfare and information projects.

51. Efforts had been made to promote the participation of women at all levels, in accordance with the principles of equality of opportunity and non-discrimination, in the various educational, economic and social fields. In the private sector, women had reached executive and managerial positions in some banks and large corporations, and there were many commercial enterprises in which women participated as investors or managers.

52. With a view to combating poverty, programmes had been drawn up to enhance the skills of women, and appropriate job opportunities had been created by projects in such fields as dressmaking and handicrafts. Programmes in nutritional and health education had been elaborated, social assistance had been provided and there had been a project to develop the capacities of women leaders to act as a link between social service of clients and local authorities. The Bahrain Training Institute trained girls for work in commercial and industrial establishments, and there were many other such government programmes. The activities of non-governmental organizations had included a project for the production of paper from palm fronds, a documentation and information centre for women, a school for disabled children, a nursery for blind children, a hearing and speech development centre and research on questions concerning women and children.

53. In keeping with world developments and in order to maintain the progress made by women, the State had enacted legislation to safeguard the rights of both genders in all fields. Legislation protected working women, citizens and expatriates alike, particularly with regard to maternity, wages, conditions of service and working conditions, and, in accordance with the Islamic Shariah, it also protected them against all forms of violence.

54. Bahrain was convinced that the guarantees provided by national laws for the protection of women was a matter that pertained to the exercise of State sovereignty. It therefore hoped that the General Assembly would reach consensus on the question of the protection of working women in a manner that was compatible with the principle of State sovereignty as embodied in the Charter.

55. Mr. KHRYSKOV (Russian Federation) said that the follow-up process to the Fourth World Conference on Women should build on the balanced approach evident at that forum, taking into account the interests of all groups of countries, including States with economies in transition. The successful implementation of the Declaration and Platform for Action and of the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women for the period 1996-2001 would depend upon cooperation between the various agencies of the United Nations system and member States. He hoped that the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality would prove to be an effective and dynamic coordination mechanism. The Secretary-General's report on the advancement of women through and in the

programmes of the United Nations system (A/51/180) contained a number of valuable proposals on the implementation of the Platform for Action which should be put into practice.

56. Of the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Platform for Action, 4 were of particular relevance to the Russian Federation. His Government had recently adopted a conceptual framework on the advancement of women outlining its strategies in those key areas, namely, the promotion of women to decision-making positions; equality in the labour market; the improvement of women's health care; and the prevention of violence against women. Subsequently, on the basis of the policy statement, his Government had adopted a national plan of action for the advancement of women and the enhancement of their role in society by the year 2000. An interdepartmental commission had been created to supervise implementation of the plan of action. The President of the Russian Federation had recently signed a decree aimed at increasing women's representation in the federal Government and in decision-making bodies throughout the Russian Federation.

57. The Commission on the Status of Women would play a major role in the follow-up to the Beijing Conference. He had noted with satisfaction the Commission's decision to review its working methods and looked forward to assisting the officers of the Commission and the Division for the Advancement of Women with the preparations for the Commission's forty-first session. The Working Group of the Commission established to consider the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women must continue its deliberations. In his view, an optional protocol would be an effective means of preventing discrimination against women and ensuring de facto equality. His delegation had welcomed the recognition by the Commission at its fortieth session in section V (Regional dimension) of draft resolution II (follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women) of the specific difficulties faced by different regions in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. That question had been the subject of a recent subregional meeting of experts from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, the first such event to be organized under the auspices of the United Nations. He welcomed such evidence of the international community's concern at the special problems faced by women in countries with economies in transition.

58. Mr. AL-MUALLA (United Arab Emirates) said that the international community had in recent years set about elaborating plans for the advancement of women that were in keeping with contemporary aspirations for global progress towards societies in which women and men played complementary and active roles in meeting the needs of national, regional and international development.

59. Despite the special importance accorded to women's issues by the United Nations over the past two decades, the efforts made had yet to bring about the qualitative change in the situation of women that had been desired, particularly in those developing countries where women were most affected by poverty, illiteracy, violence and ethnic and regional conflict.

60. Lack of sufficient resources and economic instability had prevented the developing countries from implementing systematic national plans for the

education and training of women. The international community was therefore urged to provide greater assistance to those countries in order to help them to offer equal opportunities to men and women to participate in the endeavour to eliminate poverty and achieve overall development. That would require strengthening the productive capacity of women and enabling them to have access to capital, technical assistance, training and other requirements for sustainable development.

61. The outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women had met the desire of the international community for a comprehensive programme of collective international action to change the prevailing situation of women in many parts of the world while taking account of the religious concepts and principles and the spiritual values that played a major role in the lives of peoples and in ensuring their stability.

62. Non-governmental organizations had played a prominent role in examining the situation of women and calling for the enactment of legislation and the establishment of mechanisms to promote the advancement of women at the national, regional and international levels.

63. The United Arab Emirates, acting in accordance with the principles of a Constitution that was derived from Islamic law, with its own traditions and with its Arab Islamic civilization, had always promoted equality between men and women, particularly in such matters as legal capacity, the ownership and management of property, choice of occupation and access to social services. It had enacted legislation, in the framework of labour and social security laws, that guaranteed women's constitutional rights, encouraged their participation in decision-making positions in federal institutions and conferred benefits on them in accordance with their work situation and child-care needs. Other legislation had guaranteed the rights of foreign women working in the country.

64. The commitment of the United Arab Emirates to promoting the role of women in development had been reflected in rates of female participation in the workforce, which had risen from 5.3 per cent in 1980 to 16.3 per cent in 1990. That trend had continued during the 1990s, and there had also been an increase in the numbers of women entering non-traditional occupations. In the light of the prominent role played by women in the household, the State had greatly increased the number of maternal and child health-care centres, kindergartens, girls' clubs, social development centres and women's health centres. It intended to formulate new literacy programmes for women and to encourage technical and vocational training for women and the revival of handicrafts, particularly in rural areas. The State had also used the mass media to educate women in child care and household matters and to enhance their role in protecting the environment and combating social problems.

65. The State had supported national women's organizations through the General Union of Women, which had assumed responsibility for addressing various women's issues and for implementing social and cultural activities and had given women an opportunity to participate in relevant regional and international activities.

66. In order to benefit from the significant role women could play in collective international efforts, the United Nations and its specialized

agencies and other international institutions must reform their existing procedures and develop programmes and activities to promote women's participation in decision-making and in the elaboration and implementation of global strategies.

67. Mrs. ILLO (Niger) said that, in the Niger and all other African countries, women contributed to economic, social and cultural development, particularly in the rural areas, where they often worked an average of 17 hours a day. The value of their work was not recognized, however, and despite many promises by politicians, the situation of women in the Niger had not improved. That was due to a number of factors, including sociological attitudes which perpetuated the domination of women; illiteracy among women (91 per cent of women were illiterate); the fact that women's roles, needs and responsibilities were not seriously taken into account in economic and social development policies; the priority accorded to technical solutions to women's problems; and the marginalization of women in political bodies, even though women represented a vast proportion of the electorate. In 1995, 5 out of 83 deputies and 4 out of 28 ministers had been women. Currently, only 4 out of 25 Government ministers were women.

68. In the context of a new democracy, the women of the Niger were promoting the elaboration and implementation of a national policy for the advancement of women. A triennial plan of action had been drafted, which took into account the recommendations of the Beijing Declaration. It had 13 objectives, including better education for women. Moreover, taking women into account in the democratic process would be a boon to national economic, social and cultural development as a whole. Implementation of the action plan was at a standstill, however, owing to the unprecedented financial crisis in the Niger. Her delegation was therefore concerned that the Organization's resources for development activities had been reduced.

69. She expressed her delegation's full support for the efforts of the Secretary-General to follow up the Beijing Platform for Action. Her delegation welcomed the efforts of UNIFEM in the preparation of the Fourth World Conference on Women and hoped that it would redouble its efforts to promote the political and economic development of African women. She expressed appreciation for the work of women's associations and non-governmental organizations in the Niger to improve the living conditions of the people, particularly women. For example, non-governmental organizations had helped to establish a small school in a village outside Niamey in order to spare young children from having to walk long distances to school.

70. Ms. GRAYSON (World Bank) referred to General Assembly resolution 50/227 (Section VIII) and the debate of the Economic and Social Council calling for a strengthening of the relationship between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions. In response to those appeals, the World Bank would sponsor an Open Forum in November with the Manager of its Gender Analysis and Policy Group.

71. The previous week, the World Bank had participated in the first meeting of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality. It chaired the Task Force on an Enabling Environment for Economic and Social Development, one of the

/...

three inter-agency task forces established by ACC to follow up the recommendations of the global conferences. As the advancement of women was an integral part of the development process, the work of the Task Force took into account the Beijing Conference and the gender perspective.

72. The Poverty and Gender Monitoring Unit of the World Bank reviewed all newly approved Bank projects in order to determine whether they included special components to benefit women or addressed gender issues directly. It was estimated that in the 1995 fiscal year, 28 per cent of World Bank lending operations had included gender-specific actions and an additional 9 per cent had discussed gender issues. Gender analysis was also becoming an integral part of the design of Country Assistance Strategies (CAS) prepared periodically for all borrower countries.

73. The resident missions of the World Bank in Africa held regular consultative meetings with non-governmental organizations in order to involve them in national policy-making. Coordinators of non-governmental organizations had been appointed to all resident missions in Latin America. A similar process had been launched in Asia. In Europe and Central Asia, the Bank cooperated with women's groups active in the areas of environment, entrepreneurship and employment opportunities, and the definition of social safety net programmes.

74. The percentage of World Bank lending for population, health and nutrition and education had increased from 1.4 per cent to 5.3 per cent between 1985 and 1995. The number of projects it financed in that field had risen from 8 in fiscal year 1985 to 26 in fiscal year 1995. Over the same period, education lending had increased from 6.4 per cent to 9.9 per cent of total Bank lending. Twenty-seven education projects had been financed in fiscal year 1995.

75. Increasing attention had been focused on the specific health and education needs of women and girls. The World Bank's cash contribution of US\$ 30 million to the Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest had helped to establish a funding facility for eligible micro-finance institutions. Designed mainly for countries with a per capita income below US\$ 800, the programme would help to strengthen the capacity of financial service institutions working with the poorest sectors of society, consisting mainly of women. Women entrepreneurs were therefore expected to be the main beneficiaries of the programme.

76. At the World Bank, there were three women Vice-Presidents, and women held other high-level appointments; the percentage of women in managerial and higher professional posts had also increased substantially. As women had been under-represented at the Bank in 1995, a Staffing Officer had been appointed to develop networks for external recruitment. A Senior Adviser on women's issues, appointed in 1992, organized meetings at which women could exchange ideas and information. Arrangements to help women balance their family and professional lives, including flex-time, were also available.

77. Ms. ELIAS (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the Executive Board of UNICEF had decided to focus on girls' education; adolescent girls' and women's health; and children's and women's rights in its follow-up activities to the Beijing Conference. The UNICEF Framework of Action for Girls' Education sought to reduce gender disparities in education through activities at the

global and national levels. At the national level, UNICEF helped to ensure that girls' education was integrated in the larger education system and that diversified approaches, including non-formal and distance education were taken. UNICEF was coordinating donor and national activities for girls' education in 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

78. In the area of health, UNICEF sought to increase girls' and women's access to information and to reduce maternal mortality rates. Those themes had been defined as priorities in the Latin American and Caribbean region. UNICEF and the Planning Institute of Jamaica were currently evaluating programmes on teenage pregnancy, skills training and the development of girls' self-esteem. UNICEF was addressing female genital mutilation as both a women's health issue and a violation of their rights. Plans for the elimination of genital mutilation were being implemented multilaterally in Burkina Faso, Egypt, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia and the Sudan.

79. She referred to a number of activities designed to enhance the rights of children and women. In Guyana, alliances had been formed to increase awareness of violence against women. In addition, women's and children's organizations were seeking to establish linkages between the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). That complementarity between the Convention and CEDAW was also being promoted by the UNICEF Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa. Under the project, women's and children's rights would be incorporated in law school curricula in five countries. At the global level, consultations between members of both the Committee on the Rights of the Child and CEDAW would be held in Egypt in November.

80. UNICEF had participated in the recent World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Stockholm. In her address to the Congress, the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Carol Bellamy, had emphasized that girls were the chief victims of sexual exploitation of children, owing to girls' and women's low status in society. UNICEF concurred with the recommendation of a recent United Nations study on the impact of armed conflict on children that gender-based violence should be seen as an abuse that targeted women and girls for political and strategic reasons and as a crime against the physical integrity and human dignity of the individual. It also agreed that priority should be accorded to the special needs of adolescent girls, many of whom were heads of households.

81. In early 1996, the Executive Board had adopted a mission statement reaffirming the Fund's commitment to the advancement of women by promoting the equal rights of women and girls in its country programmes and supporting their full participation in the political, social and economic development of their communities. Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was an integral part of the UNICEF objectives for sustainable human development. In mainstreaming a gender perspective in its policies and programmes, UNICEF followed the empowerment and life-cycle perspective upheld in the Platform for Action and established a linkage between women's and children's rights in the context of the themes of equality, development and peace.

82. Mr. JESSEN-PETERSEN (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that, in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, UNHCR was focusing its efforts on violence against women, women and armed conflict and women's rights. In February 1996, UNHCR had organized a symposium on gender-based violence and persecution, held in Geneva, which had encouraged the development of guidelines to assist countries granting asylum to female victims of gender-based persecution, including female genital mutilation. Thus far, Australia, Canada and the United States of America had drafted guidelines. In addition, a rights awareness training manual for refugee women was being distributed to UNHCR field offices to prevent sexual violence. In the past year, the Office had also issued guidelines on prevention and responses to sexual violence against refugees.

83. UNHCR was cooperating with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in the area of refugee women's reproductive health. In that connection, it had appointed a reproductive health officer to coordinate activities.

84. In the past five years, UNHCR had dealt with violence on a massive scale in the former Yugoslavia and in the Great Lakes region of Africa. In partnership with other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, it had set up community structures for trauma counselling, health and reproductive health care, psycho-social support and community care and rehabilitation for the survivors of violence. It was also promoting small-scale income-generating activities in reintegration programmes for refugee, displaced and returning women. A special Bosnian Women's Initiative Fund had been set up for Bosnian displaced women. The Fund provided assistance for micro-credit schemes, micro-enterprise development, training, and child and elderly care for women engaged in economic activities. Bosnian women and their associations had been consulted and had identified a number of areas of critical concern. They had also informed the Office of a rise in the incidence of domestic violence hitherto unknown in Bosnia.

85. Based on the model in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNHCR was establishing services for women survivors of the genocide in Rwanda. The programme would benefit unaccompanied women and survivors of genocide, particularly young girls and women. It already provided assistance for women's involvement in socio-economic activities, such as skills training for income-generation in agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, food processing and business management. It also provided counselling for women and girls with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). The broader aspects of the programme in Rwanda included legal education and training on rights awareness; family reunification; shelter for the homeless; psycho-social support; and vocational training and education. A total of 57 women's associations had been assisted with small grants and loans through a sub-agreement with the Ministry of Women's Affairs. UNHCR hoped to establish a revolving loan programme in 1997. Unfortunately, limited resources had made it impossible for UNHCR to assist all the women in the region, who accounted for 70 per cent of the population. Concerned that the most recent tragic developments would further aggravate the plight of refugee women and children, the High Commissioner had appealed to the combatants to respect the life of all innocent victims, particularly women and children.

86. At the first meeting of the ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, held the week before, UNHCR had offered to coordinate the preparation of a discussion on women in the peace process, conflict resolution and violence against women. As women and children comprised the vast majority of the refugee population, women must be involved in the initial stages of camp set-up and management; they must become part of the leadership and management structures at refugee sites.

87. A UNHCR Reference Group on Refugee Women, chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner, was responsible for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. Thus far, it had considered the participation of refugee women at all levels of food management and distribution in refugee camps. The Reference Group would also provide gender analysis training to all UNHCR professional staff and the Office's implementing partners. Thus far, 101 training workshops had been conducted in 46 countries. In the near future, the programme would include a gender awareness planning component and an empowerment framework for refugees, designed to avoid creating a dependency syndrome which treated refugees as passive beneficiaries. UNHCR staff and operational partners would also be expected to comply with the Policy and Guidelines on Refugee Women by mainstreaming gender concerns into their operations.

88. The High Commissioner, Mrs. Ogata, had introduced special measures in order to increase the number of women in the Office to the target of 35 per cent established by the General Assembly. As a result, the number of women had increased from 32 per cent as of November 1995 to 37.1 per cent as of September 1996. Increasingly, female staff members with appropriate qualifications were being deployed in the field where refugee women were at risk.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.