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REPORTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF SUBSIDIARY
BODIES: SOCIAL QUESTIONS

Advancement of women

Statement submitted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a
non-governmental organization in general consultative
status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.

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REPORTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES
(c) Social questions - Advancement of Women

Written statement submitted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union

At the invitation of the Parliament of India, the Inter-Parliamentary Union held, from 14 to 18 February 1997, in New Delhi, a Specialised Inter-Parliamentary Conference on « *Towards Partnership between Men and Women in Politics* ». The delegations to ECOSOC's substantive session of 1997 will find below extracts from the **Concluding Statement by the President of the Conference** (Mr. P. Sangma, Speaker of the Lok Sabha of India) summing up the work.

The results of the New Delhi Conference and a comparative world study entitled « *Men and Women in Politics : Democracy Still in the Making* », which was based on data collected from all of the world's Parliaments were presented by the Inter-Parliamentary Union to the UN Commission on the Status of Women at that body's March 1997 session. The President of IPU's Co-ordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians had been invited to form part in the Commission's panel on women's contribution to the decision-making process.

Excerpts from the New Delhi Declaration

1. Is partnership possible between men and women in politics ? Is it a source of more full-fledged and representative democracy ? How can it be achieved ? What benefit can society as a whole derive from this new way of imagining and conducting the political administration of countries? (...)

8. As politics is deeply rooted in society and reflects dominant values, our discussions highlighted clearly that developing a partnership in politics necessarily depends on the degree of partnership as a social mode in general. This is undoubtedly why the Inter-Parliamentary Union asserts that what has to be developed, in modern democratic societies, is nothing less than a new social contract in which men and women work in equality and complementarity, enriching each other mutually from their differences.

9. To address this deficit, a major shift in the mind-set of both men and women is needed. This would generate a positive change of attitudes

towards women and lead to a new balance in society at large and in politics in particular.

10. It goes without saying that women's political rights must be considered in the overall context of human rights and cannot be dissociated therefrom. Men and women politicians, governments and parliaments must pursue their efforts towards the recognition of these rights and the implementation of the international instruments which relate to them.

11. What is basically at stake is democracy itself.

12. It would appear that we are still far from a world in which the governing bodies of our political parties, which play a decisive role in political life, as well as our governments and our Parliaments are precise mirrors of our societies as regards the proportion of men and women. Nearly all delegates stated that the Constitutions of their countries provided for equality between men and women in all spheres of life. However, all those

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who spoke affirmed that, in politics, there was a huge gap between law and practice with regard to the principle of equality.

13. In different ways, many of us have however asserted that the integration of women in political life at all levels favours the democratisation of politics and that women, in turn, find that democracy offers them opportunities to become better integrated in the political process. (...)

15. Parties were asked to become more open to women and more receptive to their demands. Indeed, women find it very difficult to obtain a seat on party structures which have evolved and operate according to basically masculine criteria. (...)

17. The views on quotas were divergent. Those who favoured them stressed the need for quotas at all levels where decisions are actually taken, from parties to the national Parliament, Government and administration. It is clear to us all that quotas are only a necessary evil which should be applied on a temporary basis in order to redress the current dramatic imbalance between men and women and that they should be abolished once the desired effect has been achieved.

18. A clear consensus emerged in favour of quotas targeting candidatures rather than seats in Parliament, and in favour of them being established by parties rather than by Parliament, although the law had the advantage of making them binding on all parties. It was felt that, in order to reduce the discriminatory nature of quotas which makes them so disturbing for many of us, they should be gender neutral. (...)

20. With regard to parliamentary elections, many delegates stated that the proportional representation system or a mixed electoral system give women much greater chances of being elected than the first-past-the-post system. Political parties were, however, asked to ensure that women are well placed on electoral lists - particularly on closed lists - and that they stand in constituencies where they have a reasonable chance of being elected.

21. Parties were further asked to take measures to facilitate the equal participation of men and women in their activities, taking account of the family responsibilities of both sexes. On this subject, many speakers pointed out the importance of day-care centres and kindergartens, as well as other facilities that should be made available, enabling the requirements of both political and family life to be reconciled. The generalisation of paternity leave was also proposed.

22. Another issue which figured prominently in the debate was the fact that men and women share paid and unpaid work very unequally. It still remains true that women carry out the vast majority of the unpaid work, largely housework, whereas men carry out most of the paid work. Moreover, recent surveys indicate that women work longer hours than men. It was strongly suggested that this issue must be addressed if progress is to be achieved in women's representation in political life, which is another time-consuming activity. It was therefore suggested that proposals be placed on each national agenda to achieve a fair sharing between men and women in unpaid work.

23. As in a *leitmotiv*, women's education was mentioned in all debates (...) as one of the preconditions for the integration of more women in political life. This education should be provided for men as much as for women in order to break down patriarchal mind-sets and should start at a very early age.

24. In addition, a lengthy debate was devoted more particularly to women's political and electoral training. It goes without saying that such training is equally indispensable for men and for women, but it emerged from the debate that pre-training is required for women. This training should target three aspects.

- ♦ First of all, the exercise of citizenship (...)
- ♦ The ability to stand for election and to conduct an electoral campaign (...)
- ♦ Learning the use of parliamentary procedures so as to be able to fulfil electoral commitments.

25. Other important recommendations made during the debate, included: (...)

31. It has been said time and time again that in politics, commitment, active ongoing presence and conviction can make up for insufficient resources, including financial means, and that good media coverage does as much to win an election as large sums of money.

32. Today, the media also play a very important role in politics. No politician, man or woman, can disregard or minimise them. This is why we debated the image of women politicians in the media. As was stated by the Moderator of the lively debate on this topic between media representatives and political figures - Mrs. Dahl, the Speaker of the Swedish Parliament - our discussion was punctuated by the traditional topics of the

love-hate relationship between the media and the political class and the mutual lack of understanding as to the priorities and concerns of each side. The dominant feeling was that each side has to go some way to meet the other.

33. Emphasis was placed on the need, in particular, to provide media training for women both so that they can better understand the working and priorities of the media and also so that they can learn how to get their message across. The media in fact tend to focus on people who are identified with a cause without paying attention to their gender. On the other hand, the media were invited to look into the way they portray women in general, as well as women politicians in particular, and to adopt a new outlook. If the media are aware that integrating women in politics reinforces democracy, they should, having a crucial and increasingly important role to play in the democratic process, strive to get this message across in every possible way.

34. Our main conclusion is that it is necessary to bring about a radical change in attitudes so that the image of women politicians which is relayed by the media should not be restricted only to their identity as women but should portray them as real actors in political life.

35. Some concrete suggestions were put forward, and are summed up below: (...)

36. Several delegates referred to the importance of networking among women politicians, both nationally and regionally and to the action that senior women politicians who play a model role can take in order to encourage other women to enter the political arena.

37. It was suggested that this could be facilitated through National Commissions for Women, which should be established wherever such structures are currently lacking. (...)

38. It was recommended that every State should set up a multidisciplinary advisory board having a supervisory function to ensure that the interests and needs of women are taken into account in every field.

39. (...) it was suggested that they should create special committees in charge of monitoring national, international and regional provisions regarding the rights of women, or committees on women's affairs. Parliaments should ensure the adoption of legislation regarding the implementation of women's rights. They should also work out, together with their governments,

strategies for progress to be made towards the realisation of equal partnership between men and women. Parliamentarians should also support women's NGOs.

40. The success of this Conference has encouraged us to recommend that the Inter-Parliamentary Union should do everything to ensure that broad publicity is given to these findings and their follow-up, and to increase activities to promote women's integration in political life.

41. One aspect of this integration concerns the participation of women in equal numbers with men in the work of all international bodies. (...)

42. Strengthening the Union's co-operation with the United Nations Division on the Status of Women was also proposed as a practical follow-up to the Agreement of Co-operation recently concluded between the IPU and the UN. (...)

44. In conclusion, I would like to point out that the imbalance between men and women in politics is undeniable, that a consensus between men and women has arisen here on the urgent need to remedy this situation and that practical solutions have been identified. It now remains to mobilise sustained political resolve in order to advance from words to action. This is our joint responsibility, and in the name of each and every one of you, I wish to assert here our commitment to take up this responsibility to the full. Democracy and the development of our countries are at stake.