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CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE FOR THE WORLD
CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S YEAR
3-14 March 1975

DRAFT REPORT (PART I)

Rapporteur: Ada F. M. BAILOR (Sierra Leone)

1. In her opening statement to the Consultative Committee the Secretary-General for International Women's Year and World Conference of International Women's Year spoke of the new dimension which the goals and objectives of International Women's Year had acquired with the adoption of the World Population Plan of Action as well as the resolutions adopted by the World Population Conference in August 1974, the World Food Conference in November 1974 and the twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly as well as various other United Nations bodies including the nineteenth Governing Council of UNDP, the eighteenth UNESCO Conference and the twenty-fourth session of the Commission on Social Development.
2. She spoke of the great interest in International Women's Year at the national level all over the world. A number of countries had inaugurated International Women's Year with special ceremonies, seminars and symposia.
3. A Declaration of Support for International Women's Year 1975 had been signed by more than 80 Heads of States and Governments and presented to the Secretary-General of the United Nations by Princess Pahlavi of Iran. Liaison officers had been appointed in more than 81 countries and national committees established in 42 countries.
4. She informed the Committee of the change in the dates of the World Conference of International Women's Year which was now scheduled to meet from 19 June to 2 July 1975 in place of the dates originally scheduled for 23 June to 4 July 1975.
5. She also emphasized that the proposals and recommendations of the World Conference would be of particular importance as they would be taken into consideration by the General Assembly at its seventh special session when all aspects of development would be discussed. Moreover, they would also have an impact on various important items to be discussed by the Assembly at its thirtieth session.

6. In conclusion, she expressed great confidence that the deliberations of the Consultative Committee on the Plan of Action would contribute in large measure to the success of the World Conference and to the achievement of the goals of International Women's Year for the benefit of the entire society.

7. In her opening statement the chairperson underlined the importance of the Consultative Committee in the annals of the fight for equality of men and women proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations and of multiple international instruments.

8. Although the Commission on the Status of Women had accomplished a great deal on a juridical plane for gaining recognition of the principle of equality, the international conventions that were adopted had not been ratified, and when laws were not discriminatory, practice did not conform to the de jure situation. The major problem at the present time was not so much legal discrimination, but traditional attitudes with regard to women's place in society.

9. She underlined the necessity of changing attitudes which were responsible for the image of woman as an inferior being, an image which all too often encompassed the victims themselves. For the achievement of this she underlined the role of the mass communication media as being of the utmost importance. Customs in many parts of the world prevented many girls from completing their studies, by forcing them to get married at an early age and confining them to the home. Women's relegation to the home was due to the failure to recognize the social function of motherhood, and based on the erroneous belief that the child was the sole responsibility of the mother.

10. The marginal character of women's role in the economic development of their countries including their role in agriculture was responsible for an enormous waste of human resources and low productivity.

11. Discrimination against women existed in nearly all countries but was particularly evident in the poorer countries where vital needs, such as hygiene, nutrition, literacy, shelter, housing and technical training were lacking at all levels, and in both urban and rural areas.

12. She stressed that it was to the redressing of these questions that the elaboration of the Plan of Action must address itself.

13. International Women's Year was for the international community a unique occasion for promoting equality between men and women, not only in laws but in daily life, for assuring the full participation of women, and in playing a role in the maintenance of peace. It was not so much a matter of granting rights to women as recognizing and respecting their inherent rights as human beings.

14. Furthermore, harmonious relations and goodwill between nations could not be guaranteed as long as these did not exist between men and women in their families and jobs, and in their countries.

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15. In introducing the Plan of Action, the Deputy Secretary-General for International Women's Year and the Deputy Director in charge of the Branch for the Promotion of Equality of Men and Women explained that the draft Plan of Action which was before the Committee was a working paper which was prepared on the basis of the consultations with United Nations bodies and specialized agencies.

16. In chapter II on Scope and Purpose, she drew attention to the attempt to place the Plan within a broad multidisciplinary context within the scope of policies and principles that had already been accepted. The Plan also reflected the regional Plans of Action that had been adopted by the Regional Seminars for Asia and the Pacific and for Africa on the Integration of Women in Development. The present Plan envisaged a 10-year period for its implementation with provisions for periodic review and appraisal. Emphasis in the Plan was on action at the national level which was to be supported globally and regionally by international and intergovernmental bodies and organizations. Full support of all public and private agencies and individuals was necessary to achieve the objectives of the Plan. At the international level, the concerted efforts of all international organizations were essential.

The Plan, she stressed, was presented in full recognition of wide inequalities between countries within countries and in view of this it stipulated that, where necessary, special measures may be provided for an interim period. The establishment of national commissions was also recommended as a transitional measure. The Plan included a section on "Data collection, Research and Analysis", in view of the paucity of data relating to women and their contribution to economic activities. The role of the mass communication media was considered of the utmost importance in changing attitudes which proved an obstacle to women's equality and participation in the life of the community.

17. Before launching into a discussion of the draft Plan of Action which was prepared by the Secretariat a number of representatives expressed the view that it was a useful and interesting document and formed a good basis for discussion.

18. Several representatives stressed the importance of approaching the problems of women in the context of the more general political, economic and social problems and directing programmes to all members of society without losing sight of the special problems of women. It was emphasized that the issue of achieving equality between men and women must be viewed as a part of the general struggle for achieving equality in society. The issue of discrimination against women was not an isolated issue but a problem to be viewed in the broader context of oppression against marginal groups for economic, social and other reasons. Similarly the problems of rural women must be viewed within the context of the rural family and the rural society and all of these constituted the indices of under-development.

19. Many representatives put forward the view that in the case of countries under colonial rule and fighting for national independence it was of the utmost importance that both men and women continue to join in a concerted effort to combat colonial oppression and that the present contribution of women to the struggle for national independence should be recognized. Similarly in countries where people

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were denied basic political and human rights, it was in the view of several delegations imperative, that both men and women should join in the efforts to achieve these fundamental rights.

20. In the view of several representatives, in the efforts to achieve equality between men and women priority had to be given to measures to alleviate problems of women in the developing countries, and to the status of those women who were worse off with regard to education, training, employment and income and who were also lacking in influence in society.

21. The view that the Plan of Action should be based on two principles was put forward by one of the representatives: firstly, the demand for justice such as equal pay for work of equal value, equal educational opportunities, equal access to employment opportunities, legal equality; and secondly, the demand to meet the areas of pressing need such as women's health centres, family planning centres and centres for rape victims etc.

22. With respect to equality of men and women it was pointed out that it should not be interpreted same opportunities on the basis of roles as they existed but a questioning and reassessment of roles.

23. A basic principle that was put forward and endorsed by one of the representatives was that a change in the traditional roles of women must be accompanied by a change in the traditional roles of men. For women the change must be primarily in increased possibilities for employment and political participation and for men in increased responsibilities for home and children. Women's right to employment must be ensured regardless of marital status which would give them possibilities for an active participation in the community and in public life which benefit not only the woman but her family as well.

24. Another classification of the problems that was put forward was in two broad categories: firstly, those areas which involved the attitudes of various socio-political groups and of individual men and women concerning the status of women. The second category involved specific problems regarding the primary survival needs of women and the immediate needs that were necessary to improve existing conditions. In the former, the basic problem was to change the image of woman held by both men and women as a second rate human being fit for a limited number of activities, and even in those not as a decision maker but as a passive follower. The changing of attitudes required a well-organized campaign by all groups and institutions involving all educational methods and materials as well as the mass media communications. The latter involved problems of a most urgent nature facing the greater majority of the human race and included matters which required a different approach and could, if tackled properly, allow for more immediate and speedy improvements. In this category were problems of health care, food shortage, overpopulation, illiteracy, etc. and their solution, therefore, should be a priority in the Plan of Action.

25. To achieve the objectives of development for the benefit of all individuals the need for structural changes was advocated and for the mobilization of men and women in a concerted effort to establish economic and social justice and equality for the people as a whole.

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26. A number of representatives emphasized that as it was only through the necessary international co-operation that a more just economic order could come about, the Plan of Action should stress and strengthen those concepts which promoted international co-operation and reduced international tensions.

27. A number of delegations stressed the importance of women's contribution to the development of friendly co-operation and relations between States. It was only with peace and conditions of peace that it was possible to realize the other objectives of the Year. The view set forth in the draft Plan was that peace was not just merely disengagement of armed forces but the establishment of a strategy to maintain that peace. International co-operation could be effective only if there was legal equality between States. It was relevant therefore to make a reference to the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States. Similarly it was futile to speak of equality when millions were still under the colonial yoke. A reference to the interrelationship of these problems therefore should be made in the Plan of Action.

28. A number of delegations supported strongly the endorsement in the Plan of the recommendations in the General Assembly resolution for a reduction of military expenditures by 10 per cent thus releasing part of the funds to help women and children particularly in the developing countries.

29. A few representatives opposed this suggestion on the ground that the introduction of extraneous elements would detract from the main issues. They stated that as these proposals were being discussed and studied by other more appropriate forums this was not the right place to introduce the question of disarmament. A further argument advanced in support of this view was with regard to the problem of assessment of the 10 per cent deduction when military expenditures of some States were not available.

30. With respect to the formulation of the Plan, it was suggested that it should state the goals more vigorously in the form of mandates to Governments, so that they were not just one more set of recommendations. What was really needed was active and concrete efforts to translate principles which had been accepted into reality.

31. The Plan should provide not only recommendations for the Governments but for women themselves to bring about their participation. It was stated that women had not been sufficiently vigorous and that differences due to philosophy, political trends, and economic status often produced divisive factors and prevented a unified attitude. It was necessary to set up sources of pressure within the Plan of Action in order that some of these divisions could be surmounted.

32. Some representatives suggested that the Plan of Action should not only concentrate on what should be done but also how it should be done. As the question of women's status and participation was multidimensional and multisectoral, it needed a new orientation.

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33. Some representatives expressed the view that in order to attain the objectives of the year special measures were necessary in the interim period and should be reflected in the Plan.

34. Representatives stressed the need to improve the status of women within their countries. It was essential that all existing resources within each country be utilized for women to seek educational, training and employment opportunities to assure the political right to vote, to hold office, and to exercise the functions of such office and to ensure that equal rights and responsibilities prevailed within the country and within the social and cultural life of each country.

35. Representatives while recognizing the need for national action and placing the responsibility for the implementation of the Plan on Governments stressed the need for a far greater international action than ever before to strengthen national efforts.

36. It was suggested that in order for the General Assembly to follow systematically the measures taken by the United Nations organs in this field reports must be submitted annually to the Assembly. To carry out the extra work that this would involve it was suggested by several representatives that the Branch for the Promotion for the equality between men and women should be strengthened and the Commission on the Status of Women should be given a more important role. It was also suggested that the fund for voluntary contributions established by Economic and Social Council resolution 1850 (LVI) for International Women's Year 1975 should be made permanent for projects in conformity with the objectives of the Year.

Chapter I: Background to the Plan

Chapter II: Scope and Purpose of the Plan

37. A suggestion was made to merge chapters one and two and analyse them as a whole. This seemed to be generally acceptable.

38. One view expressed was, that the background should include some reference to the special problems of women from the context of its historical and cultural evolution. In support of this view it was stated that although the problems relating to women dated back for centuries their present dimensions were new as the productive function of the family and the decision-making role had been increasingly removed from the family setting. Women were being excluded from the major share in the performance of managerial functions which they had once enjoyed. With the increasing shift of services once performed within the family structure namely, education and training, health care, etc. away from the home, the economic need for women's active participation in these income-producing activities assumed utmost importance for the development of society. It was necessary, therefore, to make at the very outset a convincing case for the economic benefits of women's participation.

39. Among the other suggestions put forward on the plan was that it should reflect achievements made in different parts of the world and in the work of the United Nations bodies in finding solutions to the problems of women.
