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WORLD PLAN OF ACTION

INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER I OF THE
DRAFT WORLD PLAN OF ACTION

Prepared by the informal working groups of the
First Committee

INTRODUCTION

1. In subscribing to the Charter, the peoples of the United Nations undertook specific commitments: "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war ... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and ... to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom".

2. The greatest and most significant achievement during recent decades has been the liberation of a large number of peoples and nations from alien colonial domination, which has permitted them to become members of the community of free peoples. Technological progress has also been achieved in all spheres of economic activity during the past three decades, thus offering substantial possibilities for improving the well-being of all peoples. However, the last vestiges of alien and colonial domination, foreign occupation, racial discrimination, apartheid and neo-colonialism in all its forms are still among the greatest obstacles to the full emancipation and progress of developing countries and of all the peoples concerned. The benefits of technological progress are not shared equitably by all members of the international community. The developing countries, which account for 70 per cent of the population of the world, receive only 30 per cent of world income. It has proved impossible to achieve uniform and balanced development of the international community under the present economic order, and therefore, it is necessary to establish a new international order in accordance with General Assembly resolution 3201 (XXIX).

3. Conventions, declarations, formal recommendations and other instruments have been adopted since the Charter came into force 1/ with a view to reinforcing, elaborating and implementing these fundamental principles and objectives. Some of them seek to safeguard and promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons without discrimination of any kind. Others deal with promotion of economic and social progress and development and the need to eliminate all forms of alien domination, dependance, neo-colonialism, and include international strategies, programmes and plans of action. Some have the more specific purpose of eliminating discrimination on the ground of sex and promoting the equal rights of men and women. These documents reflect the ever-increasing awareness in the international community of the uneven development of peoples, and of the tragedy of all forms of discrimination be it on the ground of race, sex or any other ground, and the evident will to promote progress and development in conditions of peace, equity and justice.

1/ See the annex to the present paper.

4. In these various instruments the international community has proclaimed that the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women as well as men in all fields. It has declared that all human beings without distinction have the right to enjoy the fruits of social and economic progress and should, on their part, contribute to it. It has condemned sex discrimination as fundamentally unjust, an offence against human dignity and an infringement of human rights. It has included the full integration of women in the total development effort as a stated objective of the International Development Strategy for the decade of the 1970s.

5. Despite these solemn pronouncements and notwithstanding the work accomplished in particular by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and the specialized agencies concerned, progress in translating these principles into practical reality is proving slow and uneven. The difficulties encountered in the preparation and implementation of these many instruments are attributable to the complexities created by the considerable differences between countries, regions, etc.

6. History has attested the active role which women played, together with men, in accelerating the material and spiritual progress of peoples and in the process of the progressive renewal of society; in our times, women's role will increasingly emerge as a powerful revolutionary social force.

7. There are significant differences in the status of women in different countries and regions of the world which are rooted in the political, economic and social structure, the cultural framework and the level of development of each country, and in the social category of women within a given country. However basic similarities unite women to fight differences wherever they exist in the legal, economic, social, political and cultural status of women and men.

8. As a result of the uneven development which prevails in the international economic relations, three quarters of humanity is faced with urgent and pressing social and economic problems. The women among them are even more affected by such problems and the new measures taken to improve their situation as well as their role in the process of development must be an integral part of the global project for the establishment of a new economic order.

9. In many countries women form a large part of the agricultural work force. Because of this and because of their important role in agricultural production and in the preparation, processing and marketing of food, they constitute a substantial economic resource. Nevertheless, if the rural worker's lack of technical equipment, education and training is taken into account, it will be seen that in many countries the status of women in this sector is doubly disadvantaged.

10. While industrialization provides jobs for women and constitutes one of the main means for the integration of women in the process of development, women workers are disadvantaged in many respects because of the fact that the technological structure of production in general has been oriented towards man and his requirements. Therefore special attention must be paid to the situation of the woman worker in industry and in services. Women workers feel painfully the effects of the present economic crisis, the growth of unemployment, inflation, mass poverty, lack of resources for education and medical care, unexpected and unwanted side-effects of urbanization and other migration, etc.

11. Scientific and technological developments have had both positive and negative repercussions on the situation of women in many countries. Political, economic and social factors are important in overcoming any adverse effects of such developments.

12. During the last decades women's movements and millions of women together with other progressive forces acting in many countries have focused public opinion at the national and international levels on all these problems.

13. However, that public opinion often overlooks the many women of regions under alien domination, particularly those subjected to apartheid who experience daily the terror of repression and who struggle tirelessly for the recovery of the most elementary rights of the human person.

14. The reality of the problems which women still meet in their daily life in many countries of the world in their efforts to participate in the economic and social activities in the decision-making process and the political administration of their countries, and the loss represented by the under-utilization of the potentialities of approximately 50 per cent of the world's adult population, have prompted the United Nations to proclaim 1975 as International Women's Year, and to call for intensified action to ensure the full integration of women in the total development effort, and to involve women widely in international co-operation and strengthening of world peace on the basis of equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities of women and men. The objective of International Women's Year is to define a society in which women participate in a real and full sense in economic, social and political life and to devise strategies whereby such societies could develop.

15. This Plan of Action is intended to strengthen the implementation of the instruments and programmes which have been adopted concerning the status of women, and to broaden and place them in a more timely context. Its purpose is mainly to stimulate national and international

action to solve the problems of underdevelopment and of the socio-economic structure which places women in an inferior position, in order to achieve the goals of International Women's Year.

16. The achievement of equality between men and women implies that they should have equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities to enable them to develop their talents and capabilities for their own personal fulfilment and the benefit of society. To that end, a reassessment of the functions and roles traditionally allotted to each sex within the family and the community at large is essential. The necessity of a change in the traditional role of men as well as of women must be recognized. In order to allow for women's equal (fuller) participation in all societal activities, socially organized services should be established and maintained to lighten household chores, and especially services for children should be provided. All efforts should be made to change social attitudes - based mainly on education - in order to bring about the acceptance of shared responsibilities for home and children by both men and women.

17. In order to promote equality between women and men Governments should ensure for both women and men equality before the law, the provision of facilities for equality of educational opportunities and training, equality in conditions of employment, including remuneration and adequate social security. Governments should recognize and undertake measures to implement men's and women's right to employment on equal conditions, regardless of marital status and their access to the whole range of economic activities. The State has also the responsibility to create conditions that promote the implementation of legal norms providing for equality of men and women and in particular the opportunity for all individuals to receive free general and primary education, and eventually compulsory general secondary education, equality in conditions of employment, and maternity protection.

18. Governments should strive to ameliorate the hard working conditions and unreasonably heavy work load, especially that fall upon large groups of women in many countries and particularly among underprivileged social groups. Governments should ensure improved access to health services, better nutrition and other social services that are essential to the improvement of the condition of women and their full participation in development on an equal basis with men.

19. Individuals and couples have the right freely and responsibly to determine the number and spacing of their children and to have the information and the means to do so. The exercise of this right is basic to the attainment of any real equality between the sexes and without its achievement women are disadvantaged in their attempt to benefit from other reforms.

20. Child-care centres and other child-minding facilities are means to supplement the training and care that the children get at home. At the same time they are of vital importance in promoting equality between men and women. Governments have therefore a responsibility to see to it that such centres and facilities are available in the first place for those children, whose parents or parent are employed, in self-employment and particularly in agriculture for rural women, in training or in education or wish to take up employment, training or education.

21. The primary objective of development being to bring about sustained improvement in the well-being of the individual and of society and to bestow benefits on all, development should be seen not only as a desirable goal in itself but also as the most important means for furthering equality of the sexes and the maintenance of peace.

22. The integration of women in development will necessitate widening their activities to embrace all aspects of social, economic, political and cultural life. They must be provided with the necessary technical training to make their contribution more effective in terms of production, and to ensure their greater participation in decision-making, planning and implementation of all programmes and projects. Full integration also implies that women receive their fair share of the benefits of development, thereby helping to ensure a more equitable distribution of income among all sectors of the population.

23. The promotion and protection of human rights for all is one of the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter whose achievement is the goal of all people. An essential element for securing the protection of human rights and full equality between men and women throughout the world is sustained international co-operation based on peace, justice and equity for all and the elimination of all sources of conflict. True international co-operation must be based, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, on fully equal rights, the observance of national independence and sovereignty including sovereignty over natural resources and the right of their exploitation, non-interference in internal affairs, the right of peoples to defend their territorial integrity, mutual advantage, the avoidance of the use or the threat of force, and the promotion and maintenance of a new just world economic order, which is the basic purpose of the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States.^{2/} International co-operation and peace requires national liberation and political and economic independence, the elimination of colonialism

^{2/} During the World Conference of the International Women's Year some representatives stated that reference to the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States should not be interpreted as indicating a change in the positions of delegations on the Charter as stated at the twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

and neo-colonialism, fascism and other similar ideologies, foreign occupation and apartheid, and the inadmissibility of acquisition or attempts to acquire territory by force, racism and discrimination in all its forms as well as recognition of the dignity of the individual and appreciation of the human person and his or her self-determination. To this end, the Plan calls for the full participation of women in all efforts to promote and maintain peace. True peace cannot be achieved unless women share with men the responsibility for establishing a new international order.

24. It is the aim of the Plan to ensure that the original and multidimensional contribution - both actual and potential - of women is not overlooked in existing concepts for development action programmes and an improved world economic equilibrium. Recommendations for national and international action are proposed with the aim of accelerating the necessary changes in all areas, and particularly in those where women have been especially disadvantaged.

25. Since the integral development of the personality of the woman as a human being is directly connected with her participation in the development process as mother, worker and citizen, policies should be developed to promote the co-ordination of these different roles of the woman so as to give the most favourable conditions for the harmonious development of her personality - an aim which is equally relevant to the development of man.

I. NATIONAL ACTION

26. This Plan provides guidelines for national action over the 10-year period from 1975 to 1985 as part of a sustained, long-term effort to achieve the objectives of the International Women's Year. The recommendations are not exhaustive, and should be considered in addition to the other existing international instruments and resolutions of the United Nations bodies which deal with the condition of women and the quality of life. They constitute rather the main areas for priority action within the decade.

27. The recommendations for national action in this Plan are addressed primarily to Governments, and to all public and private institutions, women's and youth organizations, employers, trade unions, mass communications media, non-governmental organizations, political parties and other groups.

28. Since there are wide divergencies in the situation of women in various societies, cultures and regions, reflected in differing needs and problems, each country should decide upon its own national strategy, and identify its own targets and priorities within the present World Plan. Given the changing conditions of society today, operative mechanism for assessment should be established and targets should be

linked to those set out, in particular, in the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade, 3/ and in the World Population Plan of Action. 4/

29. Changes in social and economic structures should be promoted which would make possible the full equality of women and their free access to all types of development, without discrimination of any kind, and to all types of education and employment.

30. There should be a clear commitment at all levels of government to take appropriate action to implement these targets and priorities. Commitment on the part of Governments to the ideals of equality and integration of women in society cannot be fully effective outside the larger context of commitment to transform fundamental relationships within a society in order to ensure a system that excludes the possibility of exploitation.

31. In elaborating national strategies and development plans in which women should participate, measures should be adopted to ensure that the set targets and priorities take fully into account women's interests and needs, and make adequate provision to improve their situation and increase their contribution to the development process. There should be equitable representation of women at all levels of policy- and decision-making. Appropriate national machinery and procedures should be established if they do not already exist.

32. National plans and strategies for the implementation of this Plan should be sensitive to the needs and problems of different categories of women and of women of different age groups. However, Governments should pay special attention to improving the situation of women in areas where they have been most disadvantaged and especially of those in rural and urban areas.

33. While integrated programmes for the benefit of all members of society should be the basis for action in implementing this Plan, special measures on behalf of women whose status is the result of particularly discriminatory attitudes will be necessary.

3/ General Assembly resolution 2626 (XXV) of 24 October 1970.

4/ See Report of the United Nations World Population Conference, 1974 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.75.XIII.3).

34.: The establishment of interdisciplinary and multisectoral machinery within government, such as national commissions, women's bureaux and other bodies, with adequate staff and budget, can be an effective transitional measure for accelerating the achievement of equal opportunity for women and their full integration in national life. The membership of such bodies should include both women and men, representative of all groups of society responsible for making and implementing policy decisions in the public sector. Government ministries and departments (especially those responsible for education, health, labour, justice, communications and information, culture, industry, trade, agriculture, rural development, social welfare, finance and planning), as well as appropriate private and public agencies should be represented on them.

35.: Such bodies should investigate the situation of women in all fields and at all levels and make recommendations for needed legislation, policies and programmes establishing priorities. Follow-up programmes should be maintained to monitor and evaluate the progress achieved within the country to assess the implementation of the present Plan in national plans.

36. These national bodies should also co-operate in the co-ordination of similar regional and international activities, as well as those undertaken by non-governmental organizations, and self-help programmes devised by women themselves.

37. Constitutional and legislative guarantees of the principle of non-discrimination on the ground of sex and of equal rights and responsibilities of women and men are essential. Therefore, general acceptance of the principles embodied in such legislation and a change of attitude with regard to them should be encouraged. It is also essential to ensure that the adoption and enforcement of such legislation can in itself be a significant means of influencing and changing public and private attitudes and values.

38. Governments should review their legislation affecting the status of women in the light of human rights principles and internationally accepted standards. Wherever necessary, legislation should be enacted or updated to bring national laws into conformity with the relevant international instruments. Adequate provision should also be made for the enforcement of such legislation, especially in each area dealt with in chapter II of the Plan. Where they have not already done so, Governments should take steps to ratify the relevant international conventions and fully implement their provisions. It should be noted that there are States whose national legislation guarantees women certain rights which go beyond those embodied in the relevant international instruments.

39. Appropriate bodies should be specifically entrusted with the responsibility of modernizing, changing or repealing outdated national laws and regulations, keeping them under constant review, and ensuring that their provisions are applied without discrimination. These bodies could include, for example, law commissions, human rights commissions, civil liberties unions, appeals boards, legal advisory boards and the office of ombudsman. Such bodies should have full governmental support to enable them to carry out their functions effectively. Non-governmental organizations could also play an important role in ensuring that relevant legislation is adequate, up to date and applied without discrimination.

40. Appropriate measures should be taken to inform and advise women of their rights and to provide them with every other type of assistance. Accordingly, the awareness of the mass communication media should be heightened so that they may offer their broad co-operation through public education programmes. Non-governmental organizations can and/or should be encouraged to play similar roles with regard to women. In this context, special attention should be paid to the women of rural areas, whose problem is most acute.

41. Efforts to widen opportunities for women to participate in development and to eliminate discrimination against them will require a variety of measures and action by the society at large through its governmental machinery and other institutions.

42. While some of the measures suggested could be carried out at minimum cost, implementation of this Plan will require a redefinition of certain priorities and a change in the pattern of government expenditure. In order to ensure adequate allocation of funds, Governments should explore all available sources of support, which are acceptable to Governments and in accordance with Governments' goals.

43. Special measures should also be envisaged to assist Governments whose resources are limited in carrying out specific projects or programmes. The Fund for International Women's Year established under Economic and Social Council resolution 1851 (LVI), in addition to multilateral and bilateral assistance which is vital for the purpose, should be extended provisionally pending further consideration as to its ultimate disposition in order to assist Governments whose resources are limited in carrying out specific programmes or projects. Women in countries holding special financial responsibilities entrusted by the United Nations and its specialized agencies with a view to assisting developing countries are called upon to make their contribution to the implementation of the goals set in connexion with the governmental assistance earmarked for improving the status of women especially of those in the under-developed States.

44. It is recognized that some of the objectives of this Plan have already been achieved in some countries, while in others they may only be accomplished progressively. Moreover, some measures by their very nature will take longer to implement than others. Governments are therefore urged to establish short-, medium- and long-term targets and objectives to implement the Plan.

45. On the basis of this World Plan of Action the United Nations Secretariat should elaborate a two-year plan of its own, containing several most important objectives, aiming at the implementation of the World Plan of Action under the current control of the Commission on the Status of Women, and the over-all control of the General Assembly.

46. By the end of the first five-year period (1975-1980) the achievement of the following should be envisaged as a minimum:

(a) Marked increase in literacy and civic education of women, especially in rural areas;

(b) The extension of co-educational technical and vocational training in basic skills to women and men in the industrial and agricultural sectors;

(c) Equal access at every level of education, compulsory primary school education and the measures necessary to prevent school drop-outs;

(d) Increased employment opportunities for women, reduction of unemployment and increased efforts to eliminate discrimination in the terms and conditions of employment;

(e) The establishment and increase of the infrastructural services required in both rural and urban areas;

(f) The enactment of legislation on voting and eligibility for election on equal terms with men and equal opportunity and conditions of employment including remuneration and on equality in legal capacity and the exercise thereof;

(g) To encourage a greater participation of women in policy-making positions at the local, national and international levels;

(h) Increased provision for comprehensive measures for health education and services, sanitation, nutrition, family education, family planning and other welfare services;

(i) Provision for parity in the exercise of civil, social and political rights such as those pertaining to marriage, citizenship and commerce;

(j) Recognition of the economic value of women's work in the home in domestic food production and marketing and voluntary activities not traditionally remunerated;

(k) To direct formal, non-formal and life-long education towards the re-evaluation of the man and woman, in order to ensure their full realization as an individual in the family and in society;

(l) The promotion of women's organizations as an interim measure within workers organizations and educational, economic and professional institutions;

(m) The development of modern rural technology, cottage industry, pre-school day centres, time and energy saving devices so as to help reduce the heavy work load of women, particularly those living in rural sectors and for the urban poor and thus facilitate the full participation of women in community, national and international affairs;

(n) The establishment of an inter-disciplinary and multi-sectoral machinery within the government for accelerating the achievement of equal opportunities for women and their full integration into national life.

47. These minimum objectives should be developed in more specific terms in regional plans of action.

48. The active involvement of NGO women's organizations in the achievement of the goals of the 10-year World Plan of Action at every level and especially by the effective utilization of volunteer experts and in setting up and in running of institutions and projects for the welfare of women and the dissemination of information for their advancement.
