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Mrs. MYRDAL

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Human Rights Division

Mrs. MENON

Secretary of the Commission

POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN

General Discussion

1. The CHAIRMAN, speaking as the representative of France, had little to say concerning the political rights of women in her country since their evolution was virtually complete. All French women had the right to vote and understood the meaning of that right. She herself had taken part in several electoral campaigns and had found women of all classes conscious of the responsibilities and possibilities of the vote.
2. Results had already been achieved in that field by the Commission but the subject was so important that she hoped the Commission would continue to devote considerable attention to it.
3. Finally, she indicated that Belgian women had recently taken part in a very important referendum.

/4. Mrs. URDANETA

4. Mrs. URDANETA (Venezuela) said that, from its inception, it had been one of the Commission's aims to hold its meetings in different parts of the world, and in particular, in those places where women most needed the moral support, the knowledge and the positive results acquired in the course of the Commission's work. She had therefore been very pleased when the Lebanese Government had invited the Commission to hold its last session in Beirut, taking it as proof of the fact that Lebanese women were sufficiently prepared to obtain equal political rights with men.

5. As an immediate result it was satisfactory to note that Syria and Greece had granted women municipal rights. It was to be hoped that the women's organizations in those countries would not falter in the struggle for the attainment of their full political and civil rights.

6. She believed she was interpreting the wish of all members of the Commission in hoping that, in the not distant future, Lebanese women, as well as all those who were fighting for the same ideals, would obtain the full rights to which they justly aspired.

7. Much still remained to be done in the field of discrimination between men and women; men must be educated to an understanding that an improvement in the status of women would bring about a corresponding improvement in the status of children and of the family. Much remained to be done to ensure that the countries which had not yet reformed their constitution so as to grant women political equality with men, would do so as they had undertaken in signing the United Nations Charter.

8. There was much to be done in the fields of nationality, marriage, penal and civil law, and particularly in influencing public opinion so that the Commission's efforts and discussions should not remain mere drafts and resolutions but should become effective. She therefore considered that a convention on political rights would be a practical measure for the co-ordination of their efforts.

9. Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America) said that the United States believed in equality for both men and women. Women had voted in the United States since 1920, when a Constitutional amendment had guaranteed equal suffrage

/throughout

throughout the United States. Women voted and held office on the same terms as men. They were free to enter all professions, and did so. An American woman retained her nationality on marriage, even though her husband was a foreigner. The Federal Civil Service was based on job classification without regard to the sex of the worker.

10. Men and women in America were partners. Husbands and wives were free to decide for themselves how they would bring up their families. Most young women worked for a time, but they frequently gave up their jobs after marriage when they had children and were needed at home; in America the husband usually earned enough to take care of his family. Husbands and wives planned their lives together, and the father usually shared in rearing the children and helped with the household tasks.

11. It was one of the aspirations of American women that there should be more women in public office. Many were active in local politics, but there should be many more women in positions of political leadership. They also wished to have more laws concerning equal pay -- the large industrial states already had such laws and other states were considering them.

12. For other countries, American women felt that the first essential was the vote for those who still lacked it and, once the vote had been granted, education.

13. She emphasized that both men and women did a better job when they worked together on an equal footing.

14. Miss SUTHERLAND (United Kingdom) stated that in Britain women had had full political equality for more than twenty years and had played an increasingly important part in public life. They had had three women Ministers, including two of Cabinet rank, and eleven junior Ministers in eight Governments. Women also took an important part in local politics. A woman had several times been Chairman of the London County Council, which was one of the most important municipal administrative bodies in the world, disposing of a budget larger than that of some States.

/15. She was

15. She was glad that the Commission's work had been of material assistance in helping women to achieve equal political rights, and she hoped that in the future it would be able to influence Governments to ensure real equality between boys and girls in the field of education, since lack of education was a major barrier to the achievement and exercise of political rights.

16. She pointed out that once the Commission had induced a country to modify its legislation so as to provide for equal political rights for women, it was the task of women's organizations to ensure that full and proper use was made of those rights.

17. Mrs. PEKTAS (Turkey) said that many people abroad still associated Turkish women with the veil and the harem, but even to her generation they had been things of the distant past. Women in Turkey had enjoyed educational opportunities for some considerable time and they were proud that they had been in the forefront of progressive forces that had brought about great changes in Turkey. In 1935 she had had the privilege of being among the first women ever to sit in the National Assembly.

18. Along with equal political rights Turkish women had also enjoyed equal economic rights.

19. In the present unfortunate division of the world, it was her belief that only sons born of free women could win the world its freedom.

20. Mrs. CASTILLO LEDON (Mexico) had much pleasure in informing the Commission that women in her country had enjoyed equal political rights, in the municipal sphere, since December 1946. Since then a number of women councillors had been elected and five women had become heads of town councils.

21. Women's political position, particularly with regard to Government posts, was rapidly improving. Women now held responsible positions in all fields of human activity, being employed as business executives, judges, consuls and magistrates.

22. Mexican women enjoyed complete equality with men under civil law; they retained their nationality upon marriage and received equal pay for equal work. Moreover, they hoped soon to obtain the full political rights which were their due, and they were working boldly to achieve that aim.

/23. In the

23. In the fight for that ideal they had demonstrated in a most open and positive manner their real wish to obtain the rights which were theirs according to the most elementary principles of human justice. Latterly they had taken steps to show how strong their power of collective action already was.

24. Miss McCORKINDALE (Australia) wished to pay tribute to all those who, when the United Nations was being set up, had been far-sighted enough to insert an article in the Charter covering the principle of equality between men and women.

25. The work of the Commission on the Status of Women was extremely important and the vigilance of its members would save many countries and peoples years of work in removing from the constitutions by which they were governed obsolete phraseology which carried with it restrictions on the rights of women and their opportunity to share with men in the task of building a better world.

26. Since 1908, Australian women had had the same political rights as men and only recently the Australian Government had appointed a woman to Cabinet rank. With regard to nationality, an Australian woman did not automatically lose her nationality when she married a foreigner.

27. Although progress was perhaps slow in the economic field, equality was nevertheless being achieved gradually.

28. The outlook of women would always be influenced more by their human responsibility than by material things and the contribution which an educated, well-informed woman could make was vital to higher standards of living and to international understanding and peace.

29. Miss ZUNG (China) stated, in connexion with the political rights of women in China, that the right to vote had been granted as early as 1931.

30. The Constitution of 1947 granted to every citizen, regardless of sex, the right to vote upon reaching the age of 20 and the right to be elected to political office upon reaching the age of 23.

31. In practice, however, equality did not exist. For instance, the percentage of women members in the National Assembly was very low, partly because of the lack of interest in politics on the part of the Chinese women and partly because most of them had not had the proper and adequate political education to enable them to exercise such rights as had been granted to them.

/32. Similarly,

32. Similarly, women in other parts of the world had not yet secured equal rights with men in the political, economic and educational fields, even in those countries where women had for years enjoyed the right to vote and the right to hold public office.

33. Paradoxical as it might seem, some of the worst enemies of equality between the sexes were women. The representative of China wished, therefore, to appeal to the women of the world to co-operate in the attempt being made to secure equality between the sexes.

34. Miss PEDERSEN (Denmark) declared that the women of Denmark considered the right to vote and to be elected to public office as natural as the right to live. The influence of Danish women in public life was constantly increasing. In the most recent municipal elections the number of women elected to municipal councils had increased by 25 per cent. Seventy-five per cent of the women eligible to vote, as against 85 per cent of the men, had taken part in the recent municipal elections. That discrepancy could be eliminated if all women could be persuaded to assume the full responsibilities of citizenship.

35. Although the Danish women enjoyed practically all the rights which the Commission on the Status of Women was seeking to attain, the Danish representative wished to mention one problem which she considered to be important, the principle of equal pay for equal work. That problem was in part political in nature and its solution would be governed by the extent to which women exercised their political rights. In Denmark, that principle had already been realized in public service with very few limitations. The same could not be said, however, for labour conditions in general although the situation was improving from year to year.

36. Mrs. TSALDARIS (Greece) stated that in Greece considerable strides had been made during the previous year with respect to the political rights of women. In the past Greek women had been permitted to vote in municipal elections upon reaching the age of 30 provided that they could both read and write. The latter restriction had since been abolished and the age limit had been reduced to 25 years. They had also been granted the right of election to office in municipal councils. Two women had already been appointed to the municipal council of the city of Athens and a number of women were expected to be candidates at the next municipal elections.

37. The number of registered women voters had reached the very satisfactory figure of about 600,000.
38. One of the provisions of the revised Greek Constitution granted women the right to vote in national elections.
39. The political education of women had been undertaken on an extensive scale by means of lectures, publications and broadcasts.
40. In conclusion, the Greek representative assured the Commission of the whole-hearted support of the women of Greece.
41. Mrs. KEOURY (Lebanon) regretted to state that Lebanon was one of the countries where by law women were not permitted to vote or to hold public office. The women of Lebanon had never enjoyed that great privilege.
42. Fully aware of the fact that rights should be taken and not given, the Lebanese representative felt that much of the blame for the unfortunate situation rested with the women themselves. It was true, however, that the women of Lebanon had shown a great deal of interest in achieving political rights. They had on several occasions expressed themselves very clearly on that matter. Those members of the Commission on the Status of Women who had attended its third session in Beirut would agree that the women of Lebanon were worthy of sharing equal political rights with men. They should therefore be permitted to play an equally active part in the political life of the country.
43. The Lebanese representative felt that the Government was also responsible for the fact that the women of Lebanon were being discriminated against with respect to their political rights. The Government had always shown a very positive and appreciative attitude towards women but would not go so far as to treat them on an equal basis with men in the political field. On the national level, the Lebanese Government had done all in its power to help the cause of women in the economic, educational and social fields. On the international level, it was a particular source of pride to the Lebanese representative to note that the Lebanese delegation had actively participated in the work of the Sub-Commission on the Status of Women.
44. In view of the fact that there was no basic reason for the existing discrimination against women in Lebanon, the Lebanese representative hoped, in conclusion, that it would not be long before Lebanese women were elected to Parliament.

/45. Mrs. SEN

45. Mrs. SEN (India) felt that the question of political rights for women would remain an important item on the agenda of the Commission as long as women in any part of the world were the victims of social injustice and legal inequality. Political rights formed the foundation upon which the superstructure of all other rights should be built.

46. In so far as India was concerned, however, women enjoyed the same rights as men in the matter of the franchise. Since its emergence as an independent nation India had taken energetic measures to remove all discriminations based on sex and to place her women on an equal level with men. Indian women were fully emancipated and were progressing towards complete legal, educational and economic equality. Their interest in the work of the Commission lay, therefore, not in any benefit that they desired to achieve for themselves but in the service that they wished to render to other women who had not yet reached their level of freedom.

47. Everyone in India, both men and women, enjoyed the right to take part in the government of the country either directly or through freely chosen representatives and everyone had the right of equal access to public service.

48. Women were to be found in most of the professions and in all public parties such as municipal corporations, state legislatures and the Federal Parliament. Women also held important public offices as magistrates and judges. They were generally included in the delegations sent by the Government of India to the United Nations and other international conferences. Furthermore, two women were currently serving in high office, one as a member of the Federal Cabinet and the other as an Ambassador and, until her death recently, a woman had acted as the Governor of one of the States.

49. The CHAIRMAN asked whether members agreed to set up the three Committees which had been proposed at the previous meeting.

It was decided to set up the three Committees as shown below.

1. Committee on Communications

Chairman: Miss Sutherland (United Kingdom)

Members: Australia, France, Greece, Turkey, Venezuela.

/2. Committee

2. Committee on Resolutions

Chairman: Mrs. Urdaneta (Venezuela)

Members: Australia, China, Costa Rica, Denmark, Mexico, Turkey,
United States of America.

3. Committee on Questionnaire

Chairman: Mrs. Sen (India)

Members: Denmark, Lebanon, United Kingdom, United States of America.

50. The CHAIRMAN announced that the Chairmen of the respective Committees should be left free to call meetings as and when desired and should also be allowed to appoint their own Reporteurs. Such a system would have the advantage of great flexibility of operation.

51. Mrs. TSALDARIS (Greece) asked the Secretariat to distribute to members of the Committee on Communications the document which she had prepared on the repatriation of Greek children.

Report of the Secretary-General on the possibility of proposing a convention in the field of political rights of women (E/CN.6/143)

52. The CHAIRMAN invited comments on the Secretary-General's report on the possibility of proposing a convention in the field of political rights of women (E/CN.6/143).

53. Miss PEHRSSEN (Denmark) said that the report was a very interesting document but needed some clarification.

54. Paragraph 2 mentioned that no information was available as to what countries would eventually become parties to the convention. She wondered whether any attempts had been made to secure such data either from individuals or from women's organizations at the national or international level. She thought that information could be obtained from those sources. Some Governments had in the past been reluctant to supply information but had now realized that interest was being shown in the problem and as a consequence were now taking effective action.

/55. With regard

55. With regard to section A, paragraph 3, she did not think it would be difficult to draft a convention, but unless unforeseen difficulties arose, she did not consider it necessary to convene international conferences such as those provided for in Article 62, paragraph 4 of the Charter.

56. Section B, paragraph 6 mentioned that a convention might prevent States parties to it from abrogating existing provisions of their internal law in a way which would be contrary to the provisions of the convention. For that reason, she thought that the proposed convention was undesirable. Furthermore, she did not know of any country in which women who had been given the right to vote had subsequently been disenfranchised.

57. A distinction had been drawn in section B, paragraph 7, between recommendations made by the General Assembly and those of the Economic and Social Council. She thought it would be useful if the document clearly indicated what possibilities there were for action in those cases where women had not been given political rights in certain countries, if the Commission decided that ^aconvention would not prove the most effective instrument.

58. Under the provisions of section B, paragraph 8, the Ad Hoc Committee on Implementation of Recommendations was to make recommendations; the following paragraph, however, said that the Committee's report had mentioned only treaties, conventions and protocols. She therefore wondered whether the word "recommendations" in paragraph 8 was interpreted as having a wider meaning.

59. She doubted whether the Secretary-General always had the right to ask Member States why they had not ratified or adhered to treaties, conventions and protocols, and wondered what steps could be taken to verify the degree to which ratification had been effected.

60. She suggested that the discussion might be deferred until the Commission had first decided whether it desired a convention or preferred some alternative instrument.

61. She wished to know why only three countries had ratified the Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women, as stated in section D, paragraph 17. The answer to that question might shed some light upon the practical potentialities of the proposed new convention on the political rights of women.

/62. Section E

62. Section E, paragraph 20, referred to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 56 (I) but the fact that it contained a recommendation for the adoption of measures necessary to fulfil the purposes and aims of the Charter by granting to women the same political rights as to men did not prevent the Commission from making another recommendation or from amending the text. As an alternative a new resolution could be drafted.

63. It was useful to know how far work had progressed in preparing the International Bill of Human Rights but the references made in that section of the Secretary-General's report were not clear. Section F, paragraph 28, for example, referred to article 20 (1) of the draft covenant, whereas she thought that article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was more appropriate, as it was preferable to quote from an accepted document rather than from a draft covenant. The same remarks also applied to section G, paragraph 29, subparagraph (f).

64. Mrs. MENON (Secretary of the Commission) explained that the report merely considered the possibility of proposing a convention and not the advisability of having such a document. The Secretariat had therefore carefully confined itself in its report to the possibility of proposing a convention, had called attention to the technical possibilities and had given such information as might be useful in considering the problem. No information was available as to the potential support for or opposition to such a covenant, as no steps had yet been taken to obtain relevant data from the various Governments. For the time being, the question was merely that of considering the possibility of suggesting that a covenant on the political rights of women might be drawn up.

65. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights gave a fuller description of the political rights required than article 7 mentioned by the Danish representative.

66. On the other hand, reference was made in the Secretary-General's report to article 20 of the draft covenant as it was the only article in that covenant which had a bearing on the political rights for women.

67. With regard to the question of ascertaining to what extent recommendations had been implemented by the various Governments, the Economic and Social Council had decided to make investigations on the implementation of certain resolutions adopted by the Council and by the General Assembly.

/Resolution 56 (I)

Resolution 56 (I) mentioned in the Secretary-General's report was included in that category. The representatives of two Latin American States could doubtless give the Commission some information as to the situation in their respective countries.

68. Miss PEDERSEN (Denmark) thanked Mrs. Menon for her explanations but reserved her position in connexion with the interpretation of articles 7 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

69. Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America) observed that it had been felt in the Commission on Human Rights that the Commission on the Status of Women had a very definite and vital interest in the problem of the prevention of discrimination. The Vice-Chairman at the previous session had also strongly recommended that special consideration should be given to that question.

70. Mrs. URDANEETA (Venezuela) explained that ratification had been delayed in some countries owing to the fact that their Governments were not in session at the present time. Furthermore, as certain countries which had signed the Inter-American Convention had already granted votes to women, the matter was not so urgent.

71. Mrs. CASTILLO LEDON (Mexico) agreed with the Venezuelan representative. She considered the Inter-American Convention signed at Bogota in May 1948 was an extremely important document for providing political rights to women, and it was appropriate to mention that document at the present time.

72. She recalled that the Convention on Nationality had been signed by 19 States at Uruguay in 1933. So far, all of those countries had ratified the Convention. In addition to its effect upon legislation, the Convention also had moral repercussions. Venezuela, for example, had not signed the Convention at that time but shortly afterwards had nevertheless amended its laws on nationality in conformity with the text of the Uruguay Convention. There were several other similar examples. Conventions were usually signed by countries which had already provided for certain prescribed rights in their own legislature. The documents,

/however,

however, remained open for signature and other States generally felt morally responsible to sign at some later date.

73. The procedure was somewhat lengthy and the various Governments had to prepare the necessary instruments for signature. Furthermore, in Latin America, some Governments had changed to military juntas. The constitutions of the majority of the signatory countries, however, provided for the rights in question and ratification therefore became merely a formality and in the circumstances was not an urgent matter.

74. Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America) thought that the Inter-American Convention was an extremely important document which might persuade those Latin American States which did not grant equal rights to women to change their views and amend their legislation.

75. Miss PEDERSEN (Denmark) said that although ratification by countries which had already included provisions for political rights to women in their national legislation might be considered a formality, the matter was nevertheless urgent in those countries which had made no such provision. She therefore thought that steps should be taken to ascertain why ratification had not been completed.

76. Mrs. CASTILLO LEDON (Mexico) pointed out that not only federal laws but other forms of legislation were also frequently involved in the ratification of conventions.

77. Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America) observed that when the representative of Costa Rica was present she might be able to make some interesting observations, as that country had only recently granted votes to women.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

75. Mlle PEDERSEN (Danemark) déclare que, si la ratification de la Convention par les pays qui ont déjà été inscrit dans leur législation nationale des dispositions sur l'octroi des droits politiques aux femmes peut être considérée comme une formalité, la question présente néanmoins un caractère d'urgence pour les pays qui n'ont adopté aucune de ces dispositions. Elle pense donc que l'on devrait prendre des mesures pour s'informer des raisons pour lesquelles la Convention n'a pas été ratifiée.

76. Mme CASTILLO LEDON (Mexique) signale que l'on doit tenir compte non seulement des lois nationales, mais aussi des autres formes de législation dont la ratification des conventions peut impliquer la modification.

77. Mme GOLDMAN (Etats-Unis d'Amérique) fait observer que lorsque la représentante du Costa-Rica sera présente, elle pourra présenter certaines observations intéressantes, étant donné que son pays n'a que récemment accordé le droit de vote aux femmes.

La séance est levée à 13 heures.