

Also in Russian

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

SECOND SESSION

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIFTH MEETING

Lake Success, New York

Wednesday, 7 January 1948, at 11.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mrs. Marie Helene LEFAUCHEUX (France)
Rapporteur: Mrs. COSMA (Syria)
Present: Mrs. Street (Australia)
Mrs. Uralova (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist
Republic)
Mrs. Zung (China)
Mrs. Begtrup (Denmark)
Mrs. Ramirez (Guatemala)
Begum Hamid Ali (India)
Mrs. Pektas (Turkey)
Mrs. Popova (Union of Soviet Socialist
Republics)
Miss Suthorland (United Kingdom)
Miss Konyon (United States of America)
Mrs. de Urdaneta (Venezuela)

Representatives of Specialized Agencies

Miss Maass (UNESCO)
Miss Fairchild (ILO)

Observers of Non-Governmental Organizations

Mr. Garvan (AFL)

Secretariat: Professor John P. Humphrey
Miss L. M. Mitchell (Secretary of the Commission)

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CONTINUATION OF THE DISCUSSION ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

Mrs. POPOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) gave a detailed account of the educational opportunities granted to women by the Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The Constitution established a seven year schooling for men and women alike and granted special subsidies to that effect. As a result of the changes in the educational system of the country, there were no illiterate women in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, while the census of 1897 showed that 88 per cent of the women were then illiterate.

The decree of 16 July 1946 introduced a system of separate secondary education for boys and girls with a view to adapting education to the requirements of the two sexes and created industrial schools with free food, shelter and clothing.

The budget of 1946 provided 40 billion rubles for education, which figure was 146 times higher than that allotted by the Tsarist Government.

There were at present 170,000 schools in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics attended by 17 million children. The number of secondary schools had risen from 1,900 to 12,000 in the recent years. All ethnical groups composing the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were allowed to study in their own tongues.

The present five-year plan provided for further improvements, notably by a plan to increase the number of primary and secondary schools to 193,000 by 1950.

Women have full rights to attend institutions of higher learning. Between 1917 and 1927 women represented 27 per cent of the university students. In 1946, 50 per cent of the university students were women. During the first five-year plan, there were 173,000 women graduates from the universities and 243,000 from training schools. Scientific academies were attended by 43,000 women.

Mrs. Popova proceeded to review the situation in other countries, notably in Latin America and Turkey.

In the Latin American countries, although women officially had full access to education, such access was in fact reserved to a certain economic class. In Cuba, only 33 per cent of the women attended school. In Colombia there were in all 100 university women students. In Venezuela, out of 176,000 students, there were only 163 women.

She further stated that in Turkey, 92 per cent of the women were illiterate and some 30,000 villages had no schools at all.

She proposed that after a detailed discussion of the educational status of women in the various countries the commission should present appropriate recommendations to the Economic and Social Council.

/The CHAIRMAN

The CHAIRMAN welcomed Mrs. Popova's statement, which constituted an answer to the questionnaire to which the Government of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics had not replied, but observed that the members of the Commission were not bound to give an account of the educational status of women in their respective countries. The Commission, composed of fifteen members only, represented the Economic and Social Council and the United Nations as a whole, and studies on the educational facilities in the countries which the Commission represented would necessarily be incomplete.

Mrs. URDANETA (Venezuela), in reply to Mrs. Popova's statement concerning the educational opportunities for women in South America, wished to provide certain figures and statistical data in regard to her own country.

The Venezuelan Constitution guaranteed free education to men and women alike. 70 per cent of the attendance in some schools was feminine. There were 51 per cent of women teachers in secondary schools and 30 per cent in schools of higher education.

Women occupied posts in the diplomatic and consular services as well as in all the civil services of the State.

Mrs. COSMA (Syria), Rapporteur, wished to correct certain statements made the previous day concerning women's educational status in Egypt. In her opinion, these statements were greatly exaggerated. She had first-hand information gathered during her visits of women's educational institutions of that country. At least 20 per cent of the women were literate in 1945; that figure was now probably 25 per cent or over. Elementary education was compulsory both for boys and girls, and the curriculum as comprehensive as that of any other country. All education was free. In secondary schools, girls were taught domestic arts over and above the ordinary school programme.

If that educational programme was not yet fully implemented, the reason lay in the difficulties encountered by the countries of the Near East whose efforts in recent years had been directed to the achievement of their emancipation. These countries, however, were not governed by the Islamic Law of the Koran as had been implied, although the Koran did not discriminate between men and women in the field of education but on the contrary stressed the need of equal educational opportunities for both sexes.

Mrs. LEDON (Mexico) likewise observed that Mrs. Popova's statements concerning women's educational status in Latin America were greatly exaggerated. There was no educational discrimination in Latin America except in two countries and that only with regard to standards of admission to schools. If the percentage of educated women was relatively low, it was a consequence of the denial of civic and political rights to women. Some countries were more backward, whereas in others, Uruguay for instance, there were no illiterate women.

/With regard

With regard to her own country, Mrs. Ledon stated that the University of Mexico did not discriminate between men and women students.

In conclusion, she remarked that criticisms of the situation in Latin American countries should take the form not of indictments but rather that of helpful suggestions.

Begum HAMID ALI (India), while admitting that women's education left much to be desired in the Arab countries, fully concurred in Mrs. Cosmo's statements with regard to Egypt. Her own country had granted full rights to women, both in educational and other fields, and India now had women Ambassadors, Cabinet Ministers, and other high women officials.

Mrs. PEKTAS (Turkey), in reply to the reference made to her country by the representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, stated that Turkey was one of the first countries in the Near East to grant political rights to women. A five-year primary education was compulsory for boys and girls and education was free in all grades.

If in the rural districts education was still somewhat backward, the reason lay in the difficulty in finding teachers for highly scattered rural areas. Even that situation was being successfully dealt with at the present time.

Mrs. STREET (Australia) said that at that stage a general discussion was less helpful than the consideration of specific items and proposed that the Commission should deal with the next item on the agenda.

Mrs. URALOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) stated that the figures she had given the previous day were percentages of the total female populations of the countries concerned and not percentages of age groups and that she had had no intention of being critical but merely wished to help the Commission.

A short discussion arose as to whether the Commission should proceed with the next item on the agenda, or hear the statement by the representative of the ILO, Mrs. Popova wishing that the general discussion of principles should precede the consideration of details.

A vote was taken by show of hands and it was decided to hear the statement by the representative of ILO.

Miss FAIRCHILD (International Labour Organization), in presenting the ILO's 1947 report to the United Nations, gave a detailed account of the purposes and activities of that specialized agency and called attention to the prolonged efforts it had made to have its recommendations considered by the Governments. She reviewed the various resolutions of the ILO and the Conventions which dealt with problems of maternity, equality of wages, and the welfare of women generally, such as the abolition of exploitative conditions of work, the

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providing of employment opportunities, etc. She mentioned in particular the White Lead Convention of 1921, the Night Work Convention and Recommendations of 1919 and 1934 and the Underground Work on Coal Mines Convention of 1935.

To obtain practical results, every Convention signed represented in fact a compromise between the ideal principles to be promoted and the measures capable of implementation by the Governments.

She also called the Commission's attention to the development of regional conferences, such as were held in San Diego, Havana, Mexico City, New Delhi, and Istanbul.

In conclusion, she expressed the hope that the Commission would participate in the International Labour Conference of 1948, and especially requested the Commission's advice on the question of the rights of mothers and the problems of women who had to carry the double responsibility of outside employment and home and family care.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.
