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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Seventh Session

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SECOND MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 23 March 1953, at 11 a.m.

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<u>Chairman:</u>	Miss BERNARDINO	Dominican Republic
<u>Rapporteur:</u>	Begum ANWAR AHMED	Pakistan

PRESENT: (continued)

<u>Members:</u>	Daw OHN	Burma
	Mrs. NOVIKOVA	Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
	Mrs. GALLO MULLER	Chile
	Miss TSENG	China
	Miss MAÑAS	Cuba
	Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX	France
	Mrs. GUERY	Haiti
	Mrs. TABET	Lebanon
	Miss PELEPIER	Netherlands
	Miss YOUNG	New Zealand
	Mrs. WASILKOWSKA	Poland
	Mrs. POPOVA	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
	Mrs. WARDE	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
	Mrs. HAHN	United States of America
	Mrs. SANCHEZ de URDANETA	Venezuela
<u>Also present:</u>	Mrs. de CALUO	Inter-American Commission of Women
<u>Representative of a specialized agency:</u>		
	Mrs. MYRDAL	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Representatives of non-governmental organizations:

Category A:

Miss SENDER	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)
Miss KAHN	World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU)
Mrs. BERESFORD-FOX	World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA)

Category B and Register:

Mrs. ROBERTS	Associated Country Women of the World
Mrs. VERGARA	Catholic International Union for Social Service
Mrs. MAHON Mrs. WOODSMALL)) International Alliance of Women
Mrs. CARTER Mrs. FREEMAN)) International Council of Women
Miss LAGEMANN	International Federation of Friends of Young Women
Miss ROBB	International Federation of University Women
Miss LA LONDE Miss SMITH)) International Federation of Women Lawyers
Mrs. WOLLE-EGENOLF Mrs. WISNER)) International League for the Rights of Man
Mrs. EVANS	Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations
Mrs. WALSER	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Miss GARTLAN Mrs. WEBER)) World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations
Mrs. POLSTEIN	World Union for Progressive Judaism
Mrs. ANDERSON	World's Young Women's Christian Association

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Secretariat:

Mrs. TENISON-WOODS

Chief of the Status of Women
Section

Mrs. GRINBERG-VINAVER

Secretary of the Commission

POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN (E/CN.6/209, 210, 211, 212, 212/Add.1, A/2154, A/2154/Add.1 and 2)

The CHAIRMAN called on the Commission to begin the examination of the agenda item concerning the political rights of women. That was one of the most important questions with which the Commission had had to deal since its establishment; in fact, it was the basis of all the work done by the Secretary-General in connexion with the status of women.

After having studied the problem during several successive sessions, the Commission had come to the conclusion that the time had come to ask governments to adopt a convention on the political rights of women which would, so to speak, consolidate the work done in that field by the United Nations; at its fifth session, therefore, it had recommended that the Economic and Social Council should study the draft convention drawn up by the Secretary-General at the Commission's request and approved by the latter.

At its tenth session the Council had pronounced in favour of the principle embodied in the draft and had decided to communicate the text to governments for their observations. At its fourteenth session, in May 1952, the Council had approved the draft convention and had recommended that the General Assembly should open it for the signature and ratification of States Members of the United Nations and such other States as it might think well to invite.

At the seventh session of the General Assembly the Third Committee had approved the draft, subject to a few small amendments, and had thus adopted the first international convention designed to give women equal rights with men.

The Commission could congratulate itself on the adoption of that Convention, which was one of the greatest victories so far won by women; there was no doubt that thanks to the endeavours of the Commission and the Secretariat a decisive step had been taken in the history of world feminism. She would take the opportunity to express the hope that all governments would give their representatives to the United Nations full powers to sign and ratify the Convention, which would be open for signature and ratification on 31 March 1953.

The Commission would be glad to know that since its sixth session two Member States had recognized the political rights of women; the President of the Republic of Bolivia had issued a decree on 21 July 1952 granting women the right to vote, without any distinction of class and on the same terms as men, and the President of the Republic of Mexico had proposed that the Constitution should be amended to extend the franchise to women. The amendment had already been approved by the Parliament and it was to be hoped that it would soon become law and that Mexican women, like Bolivian women and all those had struggled for recognition of their political rights, would see their hopes fulfilled.

On the other hand, it was regrettable that the Constitutions of Libya and Eritrea gave women no political rights; the Commission should continue to help the women of those countries to obtain justice.

She thought that the Commission should adopt a resolution expressing its satisfaction at the adoption of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women.

Mrs. GRINBERG-VINAVER (Secretary of the Commission) pointed out that the documents prepared by the Secretariat included a report by the Secretary-General on the action taken by the Economic and Social Council on the draft convention (E/CN.6/209) and a memorandum by the Secretary-General on new texts of constitutions, electoral laws and other legal instruments relating to the franchise of women and their eligibility to public office and functions (A/2154 and Add.1 and 2).

Since the circulation of the Secretary-General's previous memorandum. Greece had granted political rights to women by an Act of 7 June 1952, the text of which appeared in document A/2154, and under a decree of 4 November 1952 Lebanese women had obtained the right to vote and to hold office. Furthermore, on 7 March 1953 the Grand Conseil of the Canton of Geneva - where the Commission had held its previous session - had adopted an Act amending the Constitution of the Canton by the addition of the words "without distinction of sex" at the end of the list of qualifications required to enable citizens of the Canton to vote. The text had been drafted following a referendum of the female population held at Geneva on 29 and 30 November 1952 and had been adopted by the Grand Conseil by a large majority. It would subsequently be confirmed by a general referendum.

She drew the Committee's attention to table VI in document A/2154, drawn up by the Secretary-General in compliance with a request made by the Commission at its previous session, which showed the date on which women had first been granted the right to vote in a number of countries and was accompanied by explanatory notes. The table would give the Commission an accurate picture of the world situation in the matter of the political rights of women.

The Secretariat had also prepared a report on the participation of women in the political and public life of their countries (E/CN.6/212 and Add.1), in accordance with the Commission's instructions of the previous year. Unfortunately the document contained no information on some countries and only incomplete information on others. Mrs. Grinberg-Vinaver pointed out that it was only a first attempt; if the Commission so wished, the Secretariat was willing to complete the document and bring it up to date for future sessions. Moreover, since the Commission had not specified exactly what type of information it wished to receive, the Secretariat had had to make its own decisions. As far as possible it had shown the number of women or the percentage of women in the legislative organs and the executive branch of government in the various countries.

Reports on the status of women in Trust Territories (E/CN.6/210) and in Non-Self-Governing Territories (E/CN.6/211) were also before the Commission. The former document was divided into three parts, dealing respectively with political, social and economic advancement and advancement in the field of education. There, too, there were some gaps, but obviously the Secretary-General could only pass on the information that had been given him. The report concerning the Non-Self-Governing Territories was divided into two parts, the first on the status of women in general and the second on political rights. Although fragmentary, the information given showed that women were taking an increasing part in the work of the organs of the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

Mrs. SANCHEZ de URDANETA (Venezuela) also thought that the Commission should congratulate itself on the adoption of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, which represented a victory for the many women who had fought for the equality of men and women in politics and, more generally, for

the elimination of measures discriminating against women. She agreed with the Chairman that the Commission should adopt a resolution expressing its satisfaction and thanking the Secretary-General and the General Assembly for their assistance.

The Commission's task would not be really completed until all governments had signed and ratified the Convention. She reserved the right to take the floor again in order to make a statement on the activities of Venezuelan women in the political and public life of their country.

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America), like the other members of the Commission, was happy to see that.

The results achieved in certain countries since the Commission's last session continued to be encouraging. In Lebanon, Bolivia, Greece and Mexico, women had been granted far wider voting rights than in the past. In Lebanon women were already on an equal footing with men. She hoped that the representative of Lebanon would give some information on the subject and that Mrs. Ledon, who was attending the Commission's meetings as a representative of the Inter-American Commission of Women, would be able to give the Commission some details on the new rights of Mexican women. In Bolivia and Greece, women, who had already been entitled to vote in local elections, were now entitled to vote in all elections.

She thanked the Secretariat for its careful preparation of document A/2154, which was of particular value in that it indicated (table VI) the date on which women were first granted the right to vote in the various countries. Governments would thus be able to see how long women had been exercising the right to vote and which were the countries whose experience might be most useful to them.

In connexion with that document, she thought that it would be useful to have lists as complete as possible; it might be possible to adopt a standard list, covering for example all States Members of the United Nations or of specialized agencies.

Now that the Commission had achieved one of its main objectives, the time seemed to have come to take stock of the position and to lay down a line of conduct for the next year or two. There were still more than fifteen countries, nearly all Members of the United Nations, where women did not possess the right to vote. It was obvious that in some of those countries the granting of the franchise to women would give rise to certain problems, for example those connected with education and custom. The Commission should study such problems and make recommendations for their solution.

Thus, it might be useful to determine the value of the method of granting rights to women progressively. The Secretary-General's memorandum gave some interesting details on that subject. In some countries, such as New Zealand, Australia and the United States, the right to vote had been granted to women in one or more provinces or states and then had been adopted by national law. There were also areas where woman suffrage had been granted in respect to local elections only and had then gradually been extended to national elections. Those methods had stood the test. In still other countries, women were required to fulfil certain educational or other requirements which were not compulsory for men. She was not so well informed on that last point. She thought that the Secretary-General might include a table on such progressive grants in the annual memorandum.

She went on to draw attention to an aspect of the question which was not covered in the memorandum: namely, whether women who had recently been granted the right to vote had an opportunity to participate in an election. That was a matter on which the Secretary-General might also include information.

If women's voting rights were not to be a dead letter, women must take an interest in the public life of their countries. The United Nations might assist

governments in that field by means of its fellowships, which would help to train women capable of taking the initiative in countries where voting rights had not yet been granted to women or had only recently been granted to them.

She emphasized that it was not sufficient to produce a convention; consideration must also be given to the way in which governments could implement it as rapidly and effectively as possible. The Commission should take particular care not to spread its recommendations on the subject over too large a number of documents; she was impressed with the method used by ILO, which two years previously had adopted a Convention on Equal Pay for Equal Work, at the same time making a recommendation to governments containing a series of specific suggestions on how to implement the principle of equal pay. The Commission might ask the Secretary-General to summarize suggestions by the various delegates in the meeting and from earlier records of the Commission, so that the Commission could draft a simple, practical and realistic recommendation which would be useful to governments.

For example, it might be that where legislatures were not yet prepared to grant women the right to vote the Commission might recommend that any new legislation or constitutions should avoid specifically reserving voting rights to men, so that the legislature could readily revise the qualifications for electors. Such a procedure would make it possible to avoid the lengthy proceedings involved in constitutional reform once a country was ready to extend voting rights to women.

The Commission might also recommend to countries which had just achieved self-government that they should encourage granting women the same rights as men and should from the very outset allow women the right to hold public office, thus avoiding the establishment of an undesirable tradition. Such a recommendation would be particularly valuable in the case of Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories.

Mrs. QUERY (Haiti) said that the international Convention on the Political Rights of Women was without question the most important achievement of the Commission on the Status of Women. She was convinced that the Convention would have beneficial effects even in countries which did not immediately ratify it.

She wished to make a brief statement on the present political position of women in Haiti.

Under article 4 of the Constitution of 1950, women in Haiti enjoyed political rights on an equal footing with men. Only with regard to voting rights did the Constitution contain a restriction: at the present time women could vote and were eligible for municipal office only; they could not yet vote for, or be elected to, executive and legislative office. That restriction was to be abolished after the next general municipal elections, under article 4, paragraph 2, of the Constitution, which provided that the law should guarantee all political rights to women "within a period of not more than three years after the next general municipal elections". Those elections would take place in 1955.

On her return from Rio de Janeiro, where she had attended a meeting of the Inter-American Commission of Women, she had submitted a report to her country's Department of Foreign Affairs, in which she had requested that the evolution and improvement of the political status of women in Haiti might be accelerated before the tenth General Assembly of the Inter-American Commission of Women, which was to be held at Port-au-Prince in 1954.

The Department had replied that under the provisions of the Constitution it was impossible to grant women in Haiti the exercise of all political rights in 1954 and that even if the Constitution were revised, as provided for in articles 158, 159 and 160, the political status of women could not be changed until 1955 at the earliest.

Miss TSENG (China) pointed out that the figure given on page 8 of document E/CN.6/212 of the number of women representatives in the National Assembly of the Republic of China probably did not include women who represented certain professional groups, such as lawyers, teachers etc., in that Assembly. The total number of women representatives in the Assembly was far more than eighty-four, the figure given in the document. Since the Chinese Government had been established in Formosa, though a large number of the men have remained on the Chinese mainland, the ratio of women to men had somewhat improved.

Chinese women had had political rights since 1916 but they had not fully exercised them until 1947. Although at that time women on the Chinese mainland enjoyed only partial political rights, in Formosa they were on an absolutely equal footing with men.

Mrs. GRINBERG-VINAVER (Secretary of the Commission), replying to the Chinese representative's comment, pointed out that document E/CN.6/212 contained information communicated to the Secretariat by the various governments and that the most recent information regarding China dated from 1947. The Secretariat would be pleased to bring the document up to date with regard to China, on the basis of any supplementary information that the Chinese Government might be able to supply.

Miss TSENG (China) said that she would do her best to arrange for up-to-date information on that subject to be sent to the Secretariat.

Mrs. WARDE (United Kingdom) agreed that the adoption of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women marked a considerable step forward in the work of the Commission. At the seventh session of the General Assembly the United Kingdom delegation, anxious that no obstacle should be placed in the way of the adoption of a convention on that subject, had voted for the draft resolution proposing that the Convention should be opened to signature and ratification by governments. She must reiterate, however, that the present text contained some provisions to which the United Kingdom Government would be unable to agree until such time as certain changes had occurred in the political, economic and social fields.

Miss MANAS (Cuba) fully agreed with the Chairman. Her delegation's position was well known and there was no need to speak of the efforts it had made to secure the adoption of a convention on the political rights of women.

She thought it particularly significant that the Canton of Geneva, where the Commission had held its previous session, had amended its Constitution to grant political rights to women; it would undoubtedly be an excellent thing if the Commission could continue to hold sessions in countries where women did not as yet enjoy political rights, or in neighbouring countries, so that the influence of its work might be more directly felt.

With regard to Libya and Eritrea, it would be very useful if the Secretariat prepared a detailed study on the position of women in those countries, to enable the Commission to decide what steps should be taken.

Mrs. TENISON-WOODS (Secretariat) gave the Commission some information on Libya and Eritrea.

With regard to Libya, she recalled that in General Assembly resolution 289 (IV) of 21 November 1949, provision had been made for a United Nations Commissioner in Libya to assist the Libyan people in the formulation of their Constitution and the establishment of an independent State. The Constitution drawn up by the Libyan National Assembly contained no provisions concerning the electoral rights of the people. Article 204 merely provided that the Provisional Federal Government should draw up the first electoral law for Parliament to be submitted to the National Assembly. On 6 November 1951 the National Assembly had adopted an electoral law granting the right to vote and to hold public office to all Libyan males. The United Nations Commissioner had considered that the responsibility for the preparation of an electoral law devolved upon the Provisional Government and the Libyan National Assembly and that his own advisory functions had come to an end with the promulgation of the Constitution. He had therefore merely submitted a few personal comments on the draft law which had been transmitted to him but had not offered any formal advice on the subject. At an informal meeting on 31 October 1951 with the Working Group which the Libyan National Assembly had instructed to prepare an electoral law, the Chairman of the Group had said that in drafting the text under consideration the Provisional Government had borne in mind that Libya had no experience in the matter of elections and that it had therefore been impossible to propose a law as perfect as those which existed in the more advanced countries. The authors of the draft law had also had to take into account certain special conditions prevailing in Libya, such as, for instance, the existence of nomadic tribes with their own customs.

With regard to Eritrea, she reminded the Commission that General Assembly resolution 390 A (V) had provided for a United Nations Commissioner, one of whose duties was the preparation of a draft constitution in consultation with the Administering Authority, the Government of Ethiopia and the inhabitants of Eritrea. Article 20 of the Constitution, drafted in accordance with that decision and adopted by the Eritrean Assembly, provided that the electorate should consist of persons of male sex possessing Eritrean citizenship. Article 42 of the Constitution further provided that all members of the electorate were eligible for election to office, subject to certain conditions.

Mrs. POPOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that at that juncture, when the Commission was taking up item 4 of the agenda, the USSR delegation could not help expressing its surprise that the question of political equality for women, the importance of which for millions of women throughout the world could not be underestimated, had not been given the priority it deserved in the work of the present session.

The USSR delegation intended to sign the Convention on the political rights of women but it felt bound to repeat once again that the instrument was far from satisfactory. Its principal defect was that it contained no guarantee whatsoever on the part of the signatory States to ensure that women would be able freely and fully to enjoy the rights granted to them in the Convention. Moreover, it failed to mention the right of women to take an active part in public life and to hold important posts on the same footing as men. Both in the debates in the Third Committee and in the plenary meetings of the General Assembly, the USSR delegation had not failed to draw the attention of the Members of the United Nations to those serious omissions. It had proposed amendments and additions designed to improve the proposed draft but its suggestions had been rejected, albeit by a very small majority.

The USSR delegation deplored that fact all the more inasmuch as in a great many countries women were either still not entitled to vote or enjoyed that right in theory only, its exercise being subject to all sorts of restrictions based on religion, language, educational level or wealth. The situation was particularly acute in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, where women were deprived of all rights and lived as real slaves of the family and of society.

The USSR delegation was compelled once again to reiterate its conviction that a mere declaration of principle, such as that to which the new Convention on the Political Rights of Women was reduced, would not be sufficient to give effect to the principle of complete equality of men and women with regard to the franchise. In the USSR women enjoyed complete equality of rights in all respects. That equality was guaranteed to them by the Constitution and women, conscious of their responsibilities, participated very actively in national life. That experience had convinced the USSR of the useful role which women could be called upon to play in public life. In its desire to co-operate wholeheartedly in any campaign against discrimination of any kind whatever, not only would the USSR sign the Convention on the Political Rights of Women but it also declared forthwith its readiness to support the Convention, to which it considered all States Members of the United Nations should accede, in order to crown the efforts of millions of women to obtain a right which was essential to the dignity of mankind.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) wished to clarify a point concerning the territories of the French Republic outside Europe. In all those territories men and women were on a footing of equality in regard to the right to vote, with the single exception of the Moslem women in Algeria. Although Algeria was a French province it had its own Assembly, which enjoyed special powers: the French Parliament had left it, for example, the right to decide when Moslem women should be granted political rights. As the Algerian Assembly had not yet seen fit to do so, a paradoxical situation had developed - which she herself regretted - in which French citizens of the female sex who had been granted every political right under their Constitution, were deprived of the enjoyment of certain of those rights.

In reply to a question by Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France), Mrs. GRINBERG-VINAVER (Secretariat) said that, if the Commission wished, the Secretariat would be glad to include information on the number of States ratifying the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in its annual report on developments in that situation.

Begum ANWAR AHMED (Pakistan) thought that the Commission would be interested to hear of the progress made in Pakistan, a new State which might be classed among the under-developed regions of the world.

Pakistan had not held any national elections since it had been established as an independent State but general elections had taken place in two provinces, the Punjab and the North West Frontier Province. Women had participated in those elections on an equal footing with men, the only condition being that every voter must have attained twenty-one years of age.

Women had participated actively in the provincial elections which had taken place early in 1951. There had been fourteen candidates for the five seats in the Punjab Legislative Assembly reserved for women. Women had voted in large numbers, despite the very conservative attitude still prevailing in that region, and they had demonstrated great independence in the choice of their candidates. The Legislative Assemblies of the North West Frontier Province and the Bahawalpur Province each had two women members. Women were also represented on local bodies. For example, the Lahore Municipal Corporation had five women members. The women of Lahore were fighting to secure more seats on the Municipal Corporation, for they were convinced that their presence would help to improve education and health conditions in their city. The Local Bodies Institute of Pakistan had recently held its annual conference and after a lively discussion it had unanimously decided to reserve 25 per cent of the seats on the municipal corporations and 10 per cent of the seats on the municipal committees to women. Furthermore, there were two women in the Pakistani Constituent Assembly and women participated in the work of parliamentary commissions and governmental delegations. They also played an important part in the operation of all political parties and were enthusiastically and competently carrying out those varied duties.

Mrs. EVANS (Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations) said that the Liaison Committee represented twelve international organizations, which were interested in any action to do away with discrimination against women. On behalf of those organizations, the Liaison Committee congratulated the Commission on the Status of Women on the occasion of the General Assembly's adoption of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women and expressed the hope that the Commission would ensure that the Governments of Member States were requested to give effect to its provisions. The great progress which had been made in the matter of women's political rights was a source of encouragement to everyone, but there was still much to be done, particularly in the fifteen countries where women were deprived of all political rights. The Liaison Committee hoped that the Commission would exert its influence so that henceforth the Constitutions of countries achieving independence would be based on the principle of the absolute equality of men and women, as proclaimed in the United Nations Charter.

Mrs. MAHON (International Alliance of Women) said that the International Alliance of Women, which had for many years supported the principle of equality for women, welcomed the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, which would guarantee to women in the signatory States the right to participate actively in the political life of their countries.

At its last session, held at Naples in September 1952, the International Alliance of Women had adopted a resolution in which it had noted with regret that the Constitutions of countries which had recently acquired independence contained provisions denying women the right to vote or, in one country, to be elected to office; had drawn attention to the fact that in accordance with the Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights everyone had the right to participate in the government of his country either directly or through freely elected representatives; and had urgently requested the United Nations to take action for the elimination of those provisions, which were contrary to the principles of the Charter and of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, so that the women of those countries would not have to go through the same struggle as women in other countries to secure a right which was one of the elementary rights of the citizen.

8/4 a.m.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.