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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Seventh Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FOURTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 24 March 1955, at 11.10 a.m.

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A/2154, A/2154/Add.1 and 2, E/CN.6/L.97, L.98, L.99, L.100/Rev.1)
(continued)

PRESENT:

Chairman:

Miss BERNARDINO

Dominican Republic

Rapporteur:

Begum ANWAR AHMED

Pakistan

PRESENT: (continued)Members:

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Daw OEN | Burma |
| Mrs. NOVIKOVA | Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic |
| Mrs. GALLO-MULLER | Chile |
| Miss TSENG | China |
| Miss MANAS | Cuba |
| Mrs. LIEFAUCHEUX | France |
| Mrs. GUERY | Haiti |
| Mrs. TABET | Lebanon |
| Miss PELETIER | 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 |

Also present:

| | |
|-------------|------------|
| Miss FUJITA | Japan |
| Mr. HORVAT | Yugoslavia |

Representatives of specialized agencies:

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|----------------|---|
| Miss FAIRCHILD | International Labour Organisation (ILO) |
| Mrs. MYRDAL | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) |

Representatives of non-governmental organizations:

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| <u>Category A:</u> | 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) |

PRESENT: (continued)

Representatives of non-governmental organizations: (continued)

Category B and Register:

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| Mrs. GUTHRIE) Mrs. MAHON) Mrs. WOODSMALL) | International Alliance of Women |
| Mrs. CARTER | International Council of Women |
| Mrs. HYMER | International Federation of Business and Professional Women |
| Miss ROBB | International Federation of University Women |
| Miss LA LONDE) Miss SMITH) | International Federation of Women Lawyers |
| Miss WOLLE-EGENOLF | International League for the Rights of Man |
| Mrs. MCGIVERN | Pax Romana |
| Mrs. MALIN) Mrs. WALSER) | Women's International League for Peace and Freedom |
| Mrs. POLSTEIN | World Union for Progressive Judaism |
| Miss CARLAN | World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations |
| Mrs. ANDERSON | World's Young Women's Christian Association |
| <u>Secretariat:</u> | |
| 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, E/CN.6/L.97, L.98, L.99, L.100/Rev.1) (continued)

Mrs. WASILKOWSKA (Poland) said that it was clear from the documents prepared by the Secretariat, as also from the debate, that there were still a number of countries where women had not the same rights as men and suffered from discriminatory measures. The Secretariat memorandum (A/2154) showed that in twenty-two States women had not yet obtained the franchise, or only to a limited extent, i.e. in local elections and subject to conditions which were not imposed on men.

Even in countries where women had the right to vote, the Secretariat report (E/CN.6/212) showed that very few of them played any part in public life.

It was not enough to give women political rights on paper; unless those rights were to remain a dead letter steps should be taken to put them into effect.

In that connexion she would refer to the example of her own country.

Before the war Polish women had had certain political rights in theory, but in reality they had suffered from discriminatory practices in the economic, social and political spheres. Since 1945 the situation had completely changed. Article 66, paragraph 1, of the Polish constitution granted women equal rights with men in every department of public, political, economic and cultural life; paragraph 2, known in Poland as the "Magna Carta" of women, laid down the practical methods of application. Under the terms of that paragraph, women had the right to work on the same footing as men and to receive equal pay for equal work; they were entitled to leisure, holidays, social security, education; they were allowed to hold public office. Mothers and children were entitled to special protection (protection of pregnant women, leave with pay before and after confinement, maternity hospitals, day nurseries, a household help service and workers' canteens).

As Vice-President of the League of Polish Women, she had had an opportunity of appreciating how provisions of that kind could transmute an academic document into a practical reality such as the ever-growing part played by Polish women in the life of their country.

She would like to supplement the information supplied by the Polish Government to the Secretariat. Following the elections held in Poland in October 1952 many more women were taking part in public life; for example, there were three times as many women in Parliament as after the 1947 election, i.e. seventy-four deputies, or 17.5 per cent of the total. The President of the League of Polish Women was a member of the most important organ of the Government, the Council of State, of which there were only fifteen members. About 15,000 women were members of the National Councils, many of them occupying high posts. The Deputy Mayor of Warsaw, for example, was a woman, as were the mayors of many towns of over 100,000 inhabitants. There were about 300 women judges or attorneys.

Polish women played a conspicuous part in the country's economic life; there were about twenty thousand women factory managers and chief engineers, and that was only one example. Perhaps the most striking evidence of the recent changes was the position of women in the countryside. Before 1939, 60 per cent of the country people, and especially the women, had been illiterate. Today illiteracy had entirely disappeared and the country women participated in public life.

Mrs. Wasilkowska turned next to the question of the status of women in Trust Territories and Non-Self-Governing Territories. Every time that question had been taken up by an organ of the United Nations the Polish delegation, bearing in mind the obligations assumed by Member States under Articles 73 and 76 of the Charter, had taken up the cudgels on behalf of the indigenous peoples. It was a matter of general knowledge that the women in those territories were doubly oppressed, both as women and as indigenous inhabitants.

A perusal of document E/CN.6/210 showed, for example, that in many territories only men possessed the franchise; in others it was limited to taxpayers, which in practice excluded women. In still other territories it was confined to fathers and mothers having at least two children; elsewhere it was granted only to white women. If women demanded their rights they were imprisoned.

The situation of children in those territories was especially bad. They were given no education and were compelled to work for pitiful wages. Child mortality was very high.

It was obviously meaningless and even ironical to talk about political rights in territories where for the most part women had no freedom and were kept on the lowest level in the social, economic and educational spheres. The Commission, whose mandate it was to raise the status of women all over the world, ought to help those women; it should not imagine that it had done all that was expected of it by securing the adoption of a convention on the political rights of women. The value of that instrument and she, for one, was unlikely to question it, was incontestable, since her Government intended to ratify the Convention; that, however, was only a first step and the Commission should now try to get it put into practice in every country in the world, including the Trust Territories and Non-Self-Governing Territories.

Miss TSENG (China) wished to complete her statement of the previous day (E/CN.6/SR.132) by giving the Commission a few figures to show that in free China women not only enjoyed all political rights but also took an active part in the public life of their country. Of the three elected representative organs in China, the Legislative Yuan had 468 male and sixty-five female members, women thus constituting 12.2 per cent of the total members. The Supervisory Yuan consisted of seventy-nine men and seventeen women, the latter representing the relatively high figure of 17.7 per cent of the total; lastly, there were 112 women among the 1,245 members of the National Assembly, or approximately 9 per cent. With respect to public offices filled by government appointment, although of the 323 officials in the departments under the President's office, only four were women, there were 186 men and thirty-three women or slightly more than 15 per cent women in the Legislative Yuan. The figures for the Judicial Yuan, the Executive Yuan and the Examination Yuan respectively were 189 men and twenty-two women, or approximately 12 per cent, 6,421 men and 1,122 women, or 14.86 per cent, and 137 men and twelve women, or approximately 8 per cent. Furthermore, 32,258 men and 3,368 women, or approximately 16 per cent, were employed in the provincial Governments.

The recognition of political rights, however, had no real effect if it was not accompanied by freedom of opinion and of expression. In free China the people enjoyed complete freedom in that respect. The best proof of that was her own case, for the fact that she did not belong to the Kuomintang had in no way prevented her either from being elected to the National Assembly in 1948 as the representative of Hunan or, even more important, from being appointed by her Government to represent China in the Commission on the Status of Women.

Mrs. TABET (Lebanon) wished to review briefly the struggle of the women in Lebanon to gain recognition of their political rights.

At the sixth session she had informed the Commission that Lebanese women's associations had elected an executive committee and were hoping to win their cause. They had, however, had to await President Chamoun's advent to power in order to do so. On 4 November 1952 the Government had promulgated an act granting full political rights to women with an elementary school certificate (certificat d'études) or with not less than five years of schooling. The period for registration had been relatively short - until 10 December - and Lebanese women had attempted to obtain political rights for all women without exception and to have the time limit for registration extended. Decree No. 37 of 18 February 1953 had met their wishes. In that connexion she pointed out that the text of the Decree did not appear in the pamphlet entitled "The Road to Equality" which had been distributed to the members of the Commission, an omission which she was sure the Secretariat would rectify. In the meantime, municipal elections had been held, but as the new electoral lists had not been ready, the women had requested the President of the Republic to appoint a number of women counsellors. In the municipal councils, half the counsellors were elected and the other half were appointed. The President had complied with that request and had appointed three counsellors, including herself, who sat on the Public Health and Social Service Committee and on the Finance Committee and who were encouraging women to have their names placed on the electoral registers and to interest themselves in the public life of the country.

At the Commission's sixth session she had urged the Economic and Social Council to request the translation into Arabic of the brochure entitled "Political Education of Women", which she thought would be very helpful in the education of Lebanese women. She regretted that so useful a document had not yet been printed.

As regards the position of Lebanese women in private law, those representatives who had not attended the Commission's sixth session would be interested to know that marriage did not affect the property of the spouses. The woman owned, administered and disposed of her property personally. A husband could intervene only if specially authorized by his wife. He was not even entitled to require his wife to contribute to the household expenses.

She would not dwell further on the question of private law which had been discussed in her absence at the beginning of the session, but she was at the disposal of any members of the Commission who might wish for further information on the subject.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France), pointed out that the position of women in the Non-Self-Governing Territories was not quite as the Polish representative had described it and said that she would like to put the picture straight where territories under French Administration were concerned. In all those territories the French Government was seeking to grant to whole populations, without distinction, the free exercise of all political rights within the shortest possible period. In doing so, however, it had encountered certain practical difficulties which were apparent to anyone with a real knowledge of those countries. It was easy to see the difficulty of organizing genuine elections in vast territories with a widely-scattered population, and where means of communication were frequently lacking. The main problem arose in connexion with vital records, which were sometimes non-existent. That was why, particularly in territories where it was not yet possible to introduce universal suffrage, the authorities had had to take certain measures. In the case of women, they had begun by granting the right to vote to mothers of not less than two children for the simple reason that, as those women received family allowances and tax exemptions, they were officially registered, unlike the rest of the female population. There was therefore no question of a restrictive measure, but rather of a simple, practical method of organizing elections in a manner offering the best guarantee of honesty.

Mrs. POPOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) noted with regret that the position of women in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories had in no way improved since the Commission's sixth session. Those women were still deprived of all political, economic and social rights. That was a fact which should surprise no one, for there was no doubt that the Administering Authorities were exploiting the situation, keeping women in a state of ignorance and poverty which suited their own purposes. True, those powers were constantly recommending equality between men and women in all territories without exception, but their recommendations were mere window-dressing and, in order to conceal the true objectives of their policy, they took shelter behind the alleged need to respect local traditions and customs which, they contended, would preclude the rapid emancipation of women in the territories concerned.

The Commission had received very little information on the status of women in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, but, despite its inadequacy, that information showed that women enjoyed no political rights and therefore had no means of expressing their will or of participating in the political life of their country.

That fact was all the most regrettable and all the more unjust because women played an important part in the economic life of the territories concerned. Had Administering Authorities themselves not recognized that women constituted 95 per cent of the farm labour in the Cameroons and over 50 per cent in French West Africa and that in Malaya, 500,000 women were working on the rubber plantations and in the mines? It was only necessary to refer to some of the publications appearing in the countries responsible for administering Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories to see that the working conditions forced upon women and children in those territories were particularly onerous. For example, according to the December 1952 issue of "France Nouvelle", which described the working conditions of women employed in a Casablanca factory, women spent hours in an uncomfortable position trampling in the tanning pits, carrying out that exhausting work in an extremely unhealthy atmosphere. Furthermore, the principle of equal pay for equal work was not applied in the Trust Territories.

If proof were required, it would be enough to note that in Malaya, for example, women's wages were 60 per cent less than those of men engaged in the same work, while in the Cameroons men received 40 to 50 per cent more than women employed in the same duties.

It obviously could not be expected that women and children should be given special protection in territories where nutrition and medical services were still deplorable. In New Guinea, for example, the number of deaths due to malnutrition was 9 to 13 per cent of the total death rate. In Tanganyika, there were fifty doctors for 8 million inhabitants, which meant one doctor for approximately every 160,000 inhabitants. In Ruanda-Urundi there was not a single indigenous doctor and in Togoland under British Administration there were still only five doctors and four hospitals.

It was obvious that the Administering Authorities were making no effort to raise the standard of education in the Territories for which they were responsible. Over 70 per cent of the women were illiterate, and it was clear from official statistics published for 1951 that only 10 per cent of the children of school age attended school. In Ruanda-Urundi, more than 90 per cent of the women were illiterate and, according to the United Nations Visiting Mission, the education provided for children was still very rudimentary, since most of them could hardly write their names. According to the September 1951 issue of the British publication "Women Today", 70 per cent of the children in Malaya had never attended school. Reference to the report on the world social situation for 1952 made it clear that 95 per cent of the population in the Sudan was illiterate, the corresponding figure for Somaliland being 99 per cent and for the Cameroons more than 90 per cent, while the Cahiers internationaux revealed that in 1950 less than 10 per cent of the negro children in French West Africa were able to attend school.

It was clear from those data that the Administering Authorities of the Trust Territories and the Non-Self-Governing Territories were flagrantly violating the provisions of Article 76 of the Charter. The Commission on the Status of Women could not leave the women of those territories to their fate and should make every effort to induce the Powers responsible for that state of affairs to fulfil the obligations which they had undertaken.

Miss YOUNG (New Zealand) pointed out that the question of the status of women in the Trust Territories and Non-Self-Governing Territories, which affected the very life of millions of women in all parts of the world, was of particular interest to the New Zealand Government, since that country was responsible for administering the Trust Territory of Western Samoa and the Non-Self-Governing Territory of the Cook and Tokelau Islands. Those territories covered only a small fraction of the total area of dependent territories, and of those in the African continent in particular, but the status of women raised very similar problems in all those territories, and she thought that the comments which she was going to make concerning those for which New Zealand was responsible would to some extent apply to all Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories.

It should be remembered that under the Charter, questions relating to Trust Territories were the special responsibility of the Trusteeship Council, which had, in particular, the task of considering annual reports submitted by the Administering Authorities on the basis of a questionnaire, chapter III of which dealt with the status of women in the territories in question. In that connexion, she wished to pay tribute to the Chairman and to the delegation of the Dominican Republic in the Trusteeship Council, at whose suggestion the Council had undertaken a revision of the standard form in the previous year and had decided to include a special chapter on the status of women. In the case of Non-Self-Governing Territories, the United Nations was required to play a more restricted role; the information furnished by the administering Powers was examined by a committee of the General Assembly which was not competent to make precise recommendations concerning each of the territories.

By signing the Charter, the Administering Authorities of the Trust Territories and the Non-Self-Governing Territories had undertaken to promote the political, economic, social and cultural advancement of the inhabitants of the Trust Territories. She saw no justification for the USSR representative's remark that the Administering Powers were not discharging the obligations which they had assumed. Considerable progress had already been made and the competent organs of the United Nations

were every year noting that the governments concerned were making great efforts and expending large sums for the development of the countries in question which, in some cases, were also receiving technical assistance and UNICEF aid. There was certainly still much to be done, but it should not be forgotten that most of the populations of the Territories concerned were only just emerging from a primitive stage of development; customs could not be changed in a few days and indigenous women could not obtain equal rights with men except in so far as the indigenous communities themselves were prepared to accept changes. The Administering Authorities had already noticeably improved the status of indigenous women by raising the standards of living and education, and by improving hygiene and public health. In a democratic world such far-reaching changes could only come about as the result of a rather slow process of evolution.

As regards the status of women in Western Samoa, Samoan women, as organized groups, occupied an important and unchallenged position in the community. They could not be considered as outcasts or even as being in a position of inferiority. There was no discrimination under the law between men and women, but the women did not as a rule inherit the traditional Samoan titles. Women were employed in the public services and girls could obtain scholarships to study in New Zealand on the same footing as boys. Many Samoan girls had been trained as nurses or teachers. It must not be forgotten that the education of women automatically involved the education of their families, particularly in countries like Western Samoa where family ties were very strong.

She wished to say something about the highly satisfactory achievements of the women's village communities in the field of hygiene and child welfare. The work of those committees was directed by indigenous doctors and nurses. In the past twenty years a number of Samoan girls, having trained as nurses, had married and returned to their villages where, through the village committees, they had taken an active part in organizing health work. In order to encourage the active participation of the population, competition was between mothers, families and villages was encouraged; periodic inspections were carried out and baby shows were organized. The activity of the women's village committees was one of the reasons for the very low infant mortality

rate in Western Samoa; there were only 42 deaths for every 1000 live births, a rate which compared favourably with that of certain sovereign States and which was declining every year. Furthermore, the part played by the women's committees was naturally extending to the political life of Samoa.

Samoa was progressively developing towards self-government. At the present time, its legislative assembly was responsible for approving its budget and, with a few exceptions, for promulgating laws. It was obvious that responsibility for improving the status of Samoan women would rest increasingly with the Samoan people in proportion as that development continued.

That information showed that the New Zealand Government was keenly interested in improving the status of women in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories and it was convinced that the Commission on the Status of Women had a great part to play in that work. However, as she had already pointed out, there were other United Nations organs specifically responsible for questions relating to the Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories and the Commission should be careful not to go beyond its terms of reference and deal with problems which were within the direct competence of those organs. That principle was respected in the draft resolution contained in document E/CN.6/L.99 and the New Zealand delegation would therefore vote for it.

The draft resolution contained in document E/CN.6/L.100/Rev.1, on the other hand, was not entirely satisfactory. The first paragraph of the preamble of the resolution which the Commission recommended the Economic and Social Council to adopt, acknowledged implicitly that there were other areas in the world besides the Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories, where women were deprived of certain essential rights; yet, the first paragraph of the operative part referred solely to the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, implying that it was only in those territories that women were deprived of political rights. She therefore proposed to amend the first paragraph of the operative part to read as follows: "Invites the General Assembly... in order to ensure recognition of the political rights of women in countries where such rights do not exist and in Non-Self-Governing Territories and Trust Territories respectively". Lastly,

the second paragraph of the operative part appeared more or less to repeat the third paragraph of the operative part of the draft resolution contained in document E/CN.6/L.97 and it would be better to delete it. If the authors of the draft resolution could accept those amendments the New Zealand delegation would be able to support it.

Miss TSENG (China) wished to point out that in continental China, which could almost be considered a Trust Territory as its administration was virtually under the control of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, women only enjoyed political rights if they belonged to the party in power. A still more serious fact was that they were denied the most elementary freedoms, even in private life. Quoting for her information the Chinese Communist newspaper People's Daily and the dispatches of the New China News Agency, she said that between May 1950 and March 1952 the number of young women who had been led to commit suicide by the promulgation of the new Marriage Act was 100,000; the home life of 50,000,000 women had been destroyed; over 200,000 of them had been involved in law suits and subjected to interrogations and various other formalities. An article published in the Times of London of 18 March 1952 confirmed that the new Marriage Act was giving rise to strong opposition. It stated that over 4,100 young women were reported to have been involved in lawsuits during the preceding year for having violated its provisions; in addition, the reform was said to have been applied without any tact whatsoever, the authorities going so far as to interfere with romances; a trifling denunciation by a child was enough to bring a woman before one of the people's courts.

The persecution reported by the Times still continued. She therefore made an urgent appeal to the Commission not to neglect the fate of the 200,000,000 women in continental China; in view of the fact that only 5 per cent of them belonged to the Communist Party, it seemed ironical to speak of political rights, when their elementary freedom was daily trampled under foot.

Mrs. WARDE (United Kingdom), associating herself with the remarks of the New Zealand representative, thought the Commission should not lose sight of the fact that the difficulties it was discussing were not confirmed solely to trust and Non-Self Governing Territories.

The United Kingdom delegation recognized, however, that much remained to be done to ensure political equality for women and it was ready to examine any constructive proposals to improve the status of women in that respect throughout the world.

Mrs. WALSER (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) expressed the appreciation of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom for the Commission's unceasing efforts to better the position of women. The League hoped that many States would sign and ratify the Convention on the Political Rights of Women and make every effort to put it into practice. Even in countries where women had been granted the right to vote and had been eligible for office for many years, too few women were serving in positions of leadership; that fact was brought out in the statistical report published by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom on the status of women in States members of the United Nations. Believing that it was necessary to grant women not only equal rights with men, but also equal opportunities to participate in the public life of their country, the International Executive Committee of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, at its meeting in Geneva in August 1952, had adopted a resolution on the subject, which it had communicated to the Secretary-General with the request that he circulate it to United Nations Members, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 288 B (X). Members of the Commission would find the text of that resolution in document E/CN.4/NGO/41, dated 28 October 1952.

In conclusion she said that the Convention on the Political Rights of Women should be both a symbol and a challenge to all women, encouraging them to claim their share of responsibility in the work still to be done to achieve the conditions of political stability, economic security and social justice essential to a world of peace and freedom.

Mrs. CARTER (International Council of Women) said that the International Council of Women was following with interest the work for the emancipation of women throughout the world and especially in the less developed areas. For that purpose it had set up regional councils in three Non-Self-Governing Territories - Nyasaland, South-West Africa and Uganda - and in one colony, Hong Kong. Their reports showed that their tireless efforts were having a considerable effect.

It might be worth noting that the Hong Kong regional council had started a campaign at the beginning of 1951 to end a rather curious electoral discrimination: in Hong Kong, all women who spoke English were liable to jury service except those engaged in a liberal profession. However, only those women who had served on a jury could vote in municipal elections. As a result, two categories of women were debarred from the right to vote - women who did not speak English and professional women.

The International Council of Women wished to pay tribute to the United Kingdom Government for its recent report on the administration of Tanganyika in 1951: the advances made in that Territory, within a very short space of time, concerning the vote, both for European and for indigenous women, were extremely encouraging and deserved mention.

In conclusion she recalled that during its conference at Athens in 1951, the International Council of Women had adopted a resolution noting with regret the lack of educational facilities for women in the Trust Territories and urging the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations to ensure that at least one woman should be appointed as a member of the Visiting Missions to the Trust Territories. At its last session, the Trusteeship Council, on the proposal of the delegation of the Dominican Republic, had adopted a resolution to that effect; Mrs. Carter urged members of the Commission and representatives of non-governmental organizations to see that it was put into practice. She was convinced that the status of women would receive special attention from the Visiting Missions if they included at least one woman member.

The CHAIRMAN, speaking as the representative of the Dominican Republic, endorsed the appeal of the representative of the International Council of Women.

She declared the general discussion on the political rights of women closed.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.