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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

THIRD SESSION

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH MEETING

Held at Beirut, Lebanon,
on Thursday, 31 March 1949, at 3 p.m.

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1. Means of influencing public opinion.
2. Reports from the Secretary-General on pertinent aspects of the work of United Nations Commissions and Councils, and of the ILO, UNESCO, WHO, and FAO, and from regional and inter-governmental organizations specializing in questions relating to women's rights; and relations with the foregoing bodies.

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| <u>Chairman:</u> | Mrs. Marie Helene Lefauchaux | France |
| <u>Members:</u> | Mrs. Elsie Frances Byth | Australia |
| | Dr. Cecelia Sieu-Ling Zung | China |
| | Mrs. Bodil Begtrup | Denmark |
| | Mrs. Lina P. Tsaldaris | Greece |
| | Mrs. Fortuna Andre Guery | Haiti |
| | Mrs. Lakshmi Nandan Menon | India |

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Members (Continued): Mrs. Amalia C. de Castillo Ledon Mexico
Miss Marcelle Abse Syria
Mrs. Mihri Pektas Turkey
Miss Mary Sutherland United Kingdom
Mrs. Elizieveta Popova USSR
Miss Dorothy Kenyon USA
Mrs. Isabel Urdaneta Venezuela

Representatives from Specialized Agencies:

Mrs. Mildred Fairchild-Woodbury International
Labour
Organization
Miss Jeanne H. Chaton UNESCO

Representatives from Inter-Governmental Organizations:

Miss Minerva Bernardino Inter-American
Commission of
Women

Consultants from Non-Governmental Organizations (Category A):

Mrs. Marie Couette WFTU
Miss Nina Trad World Federation
of United Nations
Associations

Secretariat:

Mrs. Amanda Labarca Chief of the
Section on the
Status of Women
Mr. Edward Lawson Secretary
Mrs. Claude Day

1. MEANS OF INFLUENCING PUBLIC OPINION: Continuation of discussion.
(Item 12 of the agenda).

Draft resolution proposed by the Representative of Syria (E/CN.6/117)

Miss ABSE (Syria) introduced a resolution (E/CN.6/117) which she proposed should be amended to read:

"Requests the Secretary-General to recommend to States Members of the United Nations the preparation of biographies of women remarkable for their thoughts or actions in their respective countries; and to undertake, under the auspices of the United Nations, the publication and dissemination of these biographies by every available means".

The draft resolution, as amended, as adopted by 7 votes to none with two abstentions.

2. REPORTS FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON PERTINENT ASPECTS OF THE WORK OF UNITED NATIONS COMMISSIONS AND COUNCILS, AND OF THE ILO, UNESCO, WHO, AND FAO, AND FROM REGIONAL AND INTER-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS SPECIALIZING IN QUESTIONS RELATING TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS; AND RELATIONS WITH THE FOREGOING BODIES. (Item 13 of the agenda).

Mrs. LABARCA (Representative of the Secretary-General) said that most of the questions referred to under item 13 had already been discussed in connexion with other items on the agenda. Statements had been presented by Representatives of the ILO, UNESCO, and by the Inter-American Commission of Women; and the Resolutions of ECOSOC showed which of the Commission's recommendations had been accepted. The Commission had also received document E/CN.6/95, summarizing the work of the Social Commission on the question of traffic in women and children.

There remained for consideration the draft resolution submitted by the United States Representative, concerning relations with WHO.

Draft resolution submitted by the Representative of the United States of America (Document E/CN.6/109).

Miss KENYON (United States of America), in introducing her resolution, regretted that a Representative of WHO had not attended the present session, and that no report on the activities of the Health Organization had been received. Referring to the deplorable health conditions in many parts of the world as a result of the war, she stressed the need for doctors and nurses, in particular of nurses of

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which there was a severe shortage. The duty of caring for the sick was the birthright of women. She cited the names of famous women who had played an outstanding role in the history of doctoring and nursing in the United States and in other countries. The International Council of Nurses, set up in 1899, was the first body of women to form an international professional group. It therefore seemed appropriate, because of the great significance of nursing to all women, that the Commission on the Status of Women should call upon WHO to take action in order to encourage the recruitment of nurses, to increase scholarships and, in general, to stress the paramount importance of the nursing profession in connexion with its programme on world health. It was on those grounds that she had submitted the resolution.

Mrs. MENON (India) warmly supported the proposal; the growing shortage of nurses, if not rectified, would lead to difficulties in the application of plans and programmes for health development. In India, as in many other countries, while there seemed to be no trouble in regard to the availability of doctors, there were untold difficulties in recruiting the requisite number of nurses. The reasons were not hard to find. Women with financial means were able to obtain higher education, and did not easily take to nursing, whereas women who had a bent for nursing were not given the necessary facilities to enter the profession. The women's organizations of India had formally recommended the grant of stipends to women both before and after joining training courses in nursing. Women must be granted facilities for higher education so that the nursing profession would be recognized as one of the liberal professions.

Regulations in regard to salary and conditions of work were also essential in order to mitigate the enormous strain imposed by a noble profession which reduced human suffering, and which should not be allowed to fall in disrepute.

Mrs. PEKTAS (Turkey) thanked Miss Kenyon for having raised a question of paramount importance. In Turkey, there were a great number of women doctors, in particular, gynaecologists and pediatricians. The demand for nurses was, however, greater than the supply. She described the nursing schools in Turkey conducted under the auspices of the Red Crescent, the Department of National Defence, and a training

school specialized in the nursing of sick children at the American Hospital in Istanbul.

Mrs. POPOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) expressed surprise at the manner in which the question had been introduced by the United States Representative. The item was not included in the agenda, yet a draft resolution had been submitted in the name, as it were, of WHO, which had not been represented at the session. How was it possible to approve a programme on which nothing was known, except on the basis of a few unconvincing and insufficiently-developed remarks? Such a procedure had not been followed by any organ of the United Nations. It would be unwise and out of order, in the absence of a representative of WHO, to take a decision such as that contained in the draft resolution.

The Soviet Union did not require the help of WHO. During the last war, the lives of millions of soldiers had been saved by the heroic service of Russian women. As doctors and nurses they had given valuable support to the Red Army, which was thus enabled to be the first to repel the Nazi invader. The Soviet Union had many schools for the training of doctors and nurses, who had organized a vast movement for the collection of blood plasma for soldiers, thereby saving endless lives.

She felt that the draft resolution had not been carefully prepared. Action on such matters should be determined by the individual countries.

Mrs. FAIRCHILD-WOODBURY (ILO), speaking unofficially, informed the Commission of a private conversation she had had with the head of the Maternal and Child Welfare Division of WHO, in connexion with the possible collaboration of ILO in the field of nursing, and the development of greater training facilities. Mrs. Fairchild had also raised the question, referred to by Mrs. Memon, of the need for the adjustment of salaries, conditions of employment, and so forth. Although the conversation had been entirely at the Secretariat level, she felt that WHO would have no objection to her reporting it, especially because the resolution merely expressed interest and a hope that the present shortage of nurses might be included among pressing needs for health priorities.

Mrs. TSALDARIS (Greece) felt that the resolution was of great importance and, if adopted and applied, would greatly increase the possibility of making good the shortage of doctors and nurses, and enable

women to enter the profession in larger numbers and obtain greater experience and training.

Greece was not only the cradle of medical science, but had originated the tradition of visiting nurses. She gave a picture of training courses in all aspects of nursing available under the Red Cross and other organizations. She emphasized the unstinted help of nurses during the difficult years of 1940 and 1941, when Greece had confronted the invading Fascist troops, thereby helping to give the Soviet Union time to withstand the Nazi incursion.

She supported the United States resolution because of the important contribution made by nurses to the welfare of humanity. She also expressed appreciation to all foreign doctors and nurses who had assisted Greece during the difficult years her country had passed, and was still passing, through.

Miss SUTHERLAND (United Kingdom) welcomed the resolution on relations with WHO, which called attention to one of the most serious of health problems. The programme of no other Specialized Agency had been read and understood with greater interest by women than that of WHO, in those activities her Government was fully associated, not on account of any benefits which might accrue but because the United Kingdom might afford a valuable contribution. She recalled that the International Council of Nurses was celebrating its 50th Anniversary this year, and would be able to make effective contribution to the work of WHO.

Referring to the statement by Mrs. Labarca, she had duly received document E/CN.6/95, summarizing the work of the Social Commission in connexion with traffic in women and children, but regretted that no further documentation was available in connection with the request for information on other aspects of the Social Commission's work relating to women's rights and interests. For example, it was essential for the present Commission to discuss the draft Convention on Traffic in Women and Children in order to be satisfied that no discrimination against women was contained in the document.

Mrs. LABARCA (Representative of the Secretary-General) said that all the relevant documents had been sent to the delegations in New York for transmission to the representatives of the various governments, and that it had not been possible to bring each of these documents to Beirut.

/Mrs. GUERY

Mrs. GUERY (Haiti), in supporting the resolution, pointed out that the nursing profession had been consistently under-rated, and nurses under-remunerated. Although a school for turning out qualified nurses had been in existence for a good many years in Haiti, the profession was badly paid and many nurses had to act as midwives to complete their earning and gain a satisfactory livelihood. Scholarships should be granted for study in the United States of America, where nursing stood at a high level.

Mrs. COUETTE (WFTU) said that the question was one of the most important before the Commission and deserved more prominence on the agenda. The protection of health, in particular that of mothers, should be given special attention, since children and humanity suffered as a result. The task should not be entrusted to WHO alone, but governments should be pressed to find a solution to the problem.

The training of nurses had been widely neglected, and the profession under-estimated. Infant mortality was highest in those countries where women suffered the most, and where the shortage of nurses was singularly acute. She regretted that the Commission had not envisaged a wider enquiry.

Mrs. IBRAHIM (International Democratic Federation of Women) was surprised that relations with WHO had found a place on the agenda. In considering the protection of the health of populations, the first concern of the Commission should be measures for raising the standard of living and not questions such as the functions of specialized agencies, distribution of food through the Red Cross, the granting of scholarships, etc.

Conditions of living, especially for women in countries devastated by the war and in dependent territories, were deplorable.

The CHAIRMAN interrupted Mrs. Ibrahim to request her to confine her observations to the item of the agenda under discussion, i.e. relations with WHO.

Mrs. IBRAHIM, continuing, said the object of her intervention was to express the opinion that the Commission should give more careful study to the underlying conditions responsible for the state of health of the peoples before considering the function of WHO. The trouble must be attacked from the roots.

The CHAIRMAN, referring to the surprise expressed by the Soviet Union Representative and the Representative of the International Democratic Federation of Women in connexion with the discussion, said the agenda included an item on reports from and relations with specialized agencies, including WHO, in regard to which a resolution had been submitted by the United States Representative. She could not see that the Commission had deviated from the agenda or failed to study with sufficient care the subjects on the agenda.

She called upon the Representative of the Government of Lebanon, Mrs. Harfouche, to address the Commission on items 11 and 13.

Mrs. HARFOUCHE (Representative of the Government of Lebanon) speaking on item 13 of the agenda, referred to the United States resolution on co-ordination with WHO (E/CN.6/109). The need in Lebanon for nursing, and especially public health nursing, was very great; Lebanon was endeavouring to set up public health services and would have need for trained personnel and expert advice. Valuable work was being done in this field by WHO, which had allotted 1 1/2 million dollars in its budget for fellowships and training. It had provided great assistance in Lebanon during the cholera outbreak in 1947, and had lately started a programme of BCG vaccination. Mrs. Harfouche expressed her Committee's appreciation for the resolution presented by the United States Representative, which was motivated, she felt sure, not by the needs of that country, but out of consideration for the needs of the world as a whole and especially those of underdeveloped countries.

Speaking on item 11 of the agenda, Mrs. Harfouche assured the members of the Commission that, both by their discussions and by the influence they had exercised on the different individuals and groups with which they had come in contact, they had largely fulfilled the hopes of the Lebanese Government in extending its invitation to the Commission to meet at Beirut.

She referred to the resolution adopted by the Commission at its second session, calling for a regional conference at Beirut, simultaneously with the third session of the Commission. The Lebanese Committee of Women had been set up to secure the collaboration of the non-governmental women's organizations with the Government in planning the regional conference. It was hoped in this way that the women's organizations would be stimulated to build up public opinion

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and to secure the immediate putting into effect by the Government of the resolutions of the conference.

The agenda of the conference was mainly based on the resolutions of the Commission during its last two sessions and its present discussions. Its programme was (a) to study those resolutions and decide which it would make its own, and (b) to consider ways and means of putting them into effect. It was appropriate that the resolutions of the 2nd and 3rd sessions of the Commission had dealt not only with equality of rights for women in political and economic matters, but also with social matters.

People in the Lebanon believed that the family was the basic unit of society. That was consideration of the Committee in adopting the resolutions which would be submitted to the Lebanese Government at a general meeting on April 4th. It had been felt that the resolutions should be sent to the government -- just as those of the Commission were sent to Member States -- as a means of securing effective measures for their implementation as soon as possible.

The CHAIRMAN thanked Mrs. Harfouche for her statement and asked those members who wished to reply to confine their remarks to that part of the statement relating to item 13. The points which referred to regional conferences and non-governmental organizations would be discussed at the next meeting.

Mrs. POPOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked two questions: First, why had the Chairman, without previously consulting the Commission, allowed a consultant to speak without limitation of time, when other consultants had been limited to five minutes? Secondly, would Mrs. Harfouche explain what WHO had done to improve the position of working women in the Lebanon.

The CHAIRMAN replied that the Commission was entitled to hear any Representative of a State Member of the United Nations. Mrs. Harfouche, being the Representative of the Lebanon, was not in the same position as a Representative of a non-governmental organization.

The United States resolution on co-ordination with WHO was adopted by 13 votes to one.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.