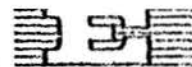


UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC  
AND  
SOCIAL COUNCIL



GENERAL  
E/CN.6/SR.97  
4 June 1951  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

---

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Fifth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE NINETY-SEVENTH MEETING

Held at Lake Success, New York,  
on Thursday, 10 May 1951, at 11 a.m.

**CONTENTS:**

Political rights of women (E/CN.6/143, E/CN.6/160, E/CN.6/L.30,  
E/CN.6/L.31, E/CN.6/L.47)

<u>Chairman:</u>	Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX	France
<u>Rapporteur:</u>	Mrs. JURDAK KHOURY	Lebanon
<u>Members:</u>	Mrs. DALY	Australia
	Miss ZUNG	China
	Mrs. de GONZALEZ	Cuba
	Miss BERNARDINO	Dominican Republic
	Mrs. TSALDARIS	Greece
	Mrs. QUERY	Haiti
	Mrs. SEN	India
	Miss LAVALLE URBINA*	Mexico
	Miss PELETIER	Netherlands
	Mrs. DEMBINSKA	Poland

---

\* alternate

Members: (continued)

Mrs. POPOVA	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Miss SUTHERLAND	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Mrs. GOLDMAN	United States of America

Observer sent by an inter-governmental organization:

Mrs. ACUNA de CHACON	Inter-American Commission of Women
----------------------	------------------------------------

Representatives of non-governmental organizations:

Category A:

Miss KAHN	World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU)
Mrs. FOX )	World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA)
Mrs. SPRAGUE )	

Category B:

Miss GUTHRIE	International Alliance of Women
Mrs. FREEMAN	International Council of Women
Mrs. HYMER	International Federation of Business and Professional Women
Mrs. SCHWARZENBACH )	International Federation of Friends of Young Women
Miss LAGEMANN )	
Mrs. EVANS	International Federation of University Women
Miss DINGMAN	International Union for Child Welfare
Miss ZIZZAMIA	International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues
Mrs. FREEMAN	Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations

Secretariat:

Mrs. TENISON-WOODS	Chief of the Status of Women Section
Mrs. GREENBERG VINAVER	Secretary of the Commission

POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN (E/CN.6/143, E/CN.6/160, E/CN.6/L.30, E/CN.6/L.31, E/CN.6/L.47)

Mrs. SEN (India) introduced the draft convention on political rights of women as proposed by the Ad Hoc Committee on Resolutions (E/CN.6/L.47). In preparing it, the Ad Hoc Committee had before it the Dominican Republic draft resolution on political rights of women (E/CN.6/L.31) and the draft convention on political rights of women in the Secretariat's memorandum (E/CN.6/160). It had also studied the provisions of the Bogota Convention (E/CN.6/143).

/Two viewpoints

Two viewpoints had emerged from the debate in the Committee. Some members had felt that a draft convention on political rights was neither a necessity nor the best way of dealing with the problem.

On the other hand those who had favoured the drafting of a convention had been divided on whether to adhere to the wording of the Bogota Convention, or to adopt a modified form of the Secretariat's text. A majority of the members of the Ad Hoc Committee had favoured the latter solution, and had decided to adopt an expanded version of the Secretariat's text for the reasons, first, that the negative statement in the Bogota Convention was undesirable, and secondly, that the Bogota Convention did not go far enough. The Ad Hoc Committee thought the convention on political rights of women drafted by the Commission on the Status of Women should be comprehensive enough to include all political rights and satisfy a majority of the countries concerned.

The members who supported the Bogota text had felt that the Committee would thereby ensure a number of supporters for the draft convention, inasmuch as that Convention had already been signed by fourteen States and ratified by seven. The members favouring the Secretariat's proposal thought that countries which had already adhered to the Bogota Convention might not be willing to ratify the same text a second time.

The largest measure of support possible had been secured for the text which the Ad Hoc Committee was submitting to the Commission in document E/CN.6/L.47. Full agreement had not been reached because some members thought that the proposals exceeded what was properly within the province of political rights, while others felt that the word "national" in articles 2 and 3 of the proposed draft convention limited women's political rights unduly.

Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America) expressed her appreciation of the efficient manner in which the representative of India had conducted the business of the Ad Hoc Committee.

The United States delegation hoped to see a draft convention on political rights of women with the largest possible number of signatures. The Commission's chief task was to aid the women of countries where full political rights had not been granted them by drafting a text so simple and yet so strong that it would be sure to be accepted by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, as well as by a maximum number of states.

The first step should be to win women the right to vote and be elected to all public offices. After that had been achieved in a convention, other steps could be considered by the Commission. As a first step, however, she moved that the following text, identical with Article 1 of the Bogota Convention, should be substituted for Articles 1, 2 and 3 of the proposed draft convention (E/CN.6/L.47): "The right to vote and to be elected to national office shall not be denied or abridged by reason of sex."

Mrs. SEN (India) pointed out that the United States draft amendment altered the text of the Bogota Convention by limiting it still further. It also drastically limited the scope of the Ad Hoc Committee's draft convention.

Mrs. POPOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the Commission had not taken a decision on the vital question of peace, which was so closely related to the question of all women's rights, but had decided to limit itself to the secondary problem of political rights of women. Furthermore, the wider aspects of that issue had been narrowed down to the question of preparing a draft convention. The United States representative went even further and severely limited the scope of the proposed draft convention, which to a majority of the Ad Hoc Committee represented the minimum which the Commission must accomplish.

The United States proposal did not directly provide that political rights should be granted to women by law. The USSR had submitted a resolution on the question which stated the problem clearly. It recognized that in a number of countries women had not yet been granted political and other rights and that the situation was particularly unsatisfactory in Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories. The USSR text also pointed out that the enjoyment of political rights was fundamental to full and complete exercise of the rights attaching to citizenship.

/As some

As some members had advocated adoption of the text of the Bogota Convention, she proposed to review the situation in countries which had subscribed to that instrument. Two years after the drafting of that Convention, only a small number of states had signed it, and only a few had ratified it. In Ecuador, under the Constitution of 1936 the duty to vote was made compulsory only for men, and therefore women were not placed on an equal footing with men. In other countries which had signed the Bogota Convention, the political rights of women were restricted in many ways.

Merely granting of rights did not ensure that in practice women would be able to enjoy them. It was for the Commission to see that women obtained the rights in practice as well as in theory. For example, in countries where very women had been granted political rights, such as the United States, only a small percentage of the members of the Congress were women. In 1949, there had not been a single woman representative in the Parliament of the Dominican Republic. Those facts illustrated the situation prevailing after the Bogota Convention, which clearly had not effectively solved the problem.

She reserved the right to speak on the draft resolution submitted by the Ad Hoc Committee at a later date.

Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) <sup>also</sup> reserved the right to speak on the draft convention on another occasion. For the moment she wished to remind the USSR representative that in a previous statement she had explained that a woman had been elected to the Dominican Republic Parliament in 1949 and that the representative had later resigned in order to accept an important administrative post. The Dominican Republic had often elected women to that high office.

Mrs. KHOURY (Lebanon) said she spoke for the women of the smaller states, who had either been granted no rights at all or who were only permitted to participate in municipal affairs.

At its third session the Commission had requested the Secretary-General to examine the possibility of proposing a convention on political rights of women similar to the Convention signed at Bogota. She felt that that had been and still was a wise request. First, the Bogota Convention was in line with the viewpoints expressed in the Commission during the previous year.

/Secondly,



Secondly, its text was simple and direct. Thirdly, a simple and concise convention would be likely to receive the support of the largest possible number of states. The Commission's purpose was to obtain the widest possible support for the granting of political rights to women. Moreover, the Economic and Social Council would be more likely to expedite the adoption of a simple text not requiring protracted debate.

The Bogota Convention itself was limited to political rights of women, which was exactly what the Commission wished to see covered in the proposed draft convention. The more advanced states would be able to accept such a text and their acceptance would add to its prestige. Seven states had already ratified the Bogota Convention and would therefore in all likelihood accept a convention drafted along similar lines. If the Commission adopted a wider text, many states might be unable to accept it. In the interest of obtaining the widest possible support, it would be best to draft a simple, direct, text relating solely to the political rights of women.

Miss PELETIER (Netherlands) could not accept the United States amendment as worded. She understood the difficulties of federal states, but wondered whether a formula could not be devised which would satisfy the Commission as a whole.

As it stood the United States amendment would wipe out paragraph 3 of the draft convention and moreover would only stress the demand that women should be eligible to national office. A convention thus restricted would not be of much interest to the women of the various countries.

In drafting a convention the Commission was attempting to help women throughout the world to gain their political rights. In the under-developed countries such rights were usually granted step by step. For that reason to request national responsibilities for women, and not stressing their participating in local bodies was inadvisable. Perhaps the United States representative could submit another formula.

/Mrs. de GONZALEZ

Mrs. de CONZALEZ (Cuba) pointed out that most of the delegations hoped that the Commission could prepare a convention which would be readily approved by the Economic and Social Council. She thought a text similar to that of the Bogota Convention would be acceptable. If the phrase "to national office" in the United States amendment were deleted, it might be satisfactory to everyone.

She disagreed that it was undesirable to state a right in the negative. That argument did not weigh as heavily as the consideration that it would be easier to win support for a text which several States had already accepted. Some of the most effective rules of moral conduct -- the Ten Commandments -- had been drafted in negative form.

The best course would be to substitute the text of the Bogota Convention for articles 1 and 2 of the proposed draft convention (E/CN.6/L.47). Article 3 of the draft convention, however, should be retained, for it expressed a concept which was extremely important in many countries and which, if retained, would not alienate support in the Economic and Social Council.

Mrs. DEMBINSKA (Poland) could not support either the draft resolution or the United States amendment. The Commission should adopt the USSR draft resolution on political rights (E/CN.6/L.30). Its broad scope would make possible the eventual eradication of all discrimination against women in the political field; it could serve as a powerful instrument for promotion of the political rights of women. It set forth many principles essential to the protection of the rights of women without distinction as to race, colour or nationality; one of the most important of them was the principle that the general political situation in a country was a major factor affecting the exercise of the political rights of all citizens. She had had occasion to comment before on the fact that discriminatory practices, the adoption of a war economy, and other undesirable factors had the effect of preventing the citizens of a country from exercising their political rights.

/In response

In response to a point of order raised by Mrs. KADURY (Lebanon), the CHAIRMAN pointed out that debate on the USSR proposal had been closed several days before, and that that proposal had not been retained by the Commission as a basis for discussion. It would not, therefore, be voted upon. She requested the representative of Poland to limit her remarks to the draft resolution now before the Commission, which was the only document upon which a decision must be reached.

Mrs. DEMBINSKA (Poland) explained that her remarks bore upon general principles, which were closely related to the decision the Commission must take. The principles must be clarified before the Commission could vote.

The discrimination practised against Negro women in the United States was a well-known fact, which could not be disguised or ignored. The United States representative's remarks at a recent meeting concerning Mrs. Edith Sampson, a member of the permanent United States delegation to the United Nations, could not alter the fact that discrimination had many times been practised against her. Her appointment to the United States delegation was little more than a smoke-screen.

The situation as regards the exercise of women's rights was even worse in the under-developed areas and the Trust Territories, as the USSR delegation had emphasized in its draft resolution. The draft report on the recent session of the Ad Hoc Committee on Slavery stressed the fact that in many African territories women lived in a condition of servitude; they could be disposed of in marriage by their parents without their consent, and, once married, they were considered as the property of their husbands. A Secretariat memorandum published in February 1950 set forth many shocking facts about the traffic in women and children in Tanganyika, the Cameroons, and other African territories.

The success of the women of Poland in their struggle for political rights had given them a deep sympathy for all women throughout the world who were struggling against persecution. The USSR proposal embodied the principles which must be affirmed in order to aid those women to obtain and exercise political rights.



Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) recalled that several days before she had appealed to the Commission to adopt a draft convention on political rights, bearing in mind the relevant article of the Convention adopted at Bogota. She had not suggested the adoption of the latter text itself, because she felt that the Commission should have the broadest possible view of the question and take a stand in favour of complete equality of rights for men and women. She now found herself in a delicate position, however, as regards the amendment just submitted by the United States delegation, since her Government had been one of the original sponsors of the Bogota Convention, and she herself, as representative of her country at the Conference, had signed it. Accordingly, although she would have preferred a convention broader in scope, she did not feel that she could vote against the United States amendment.

Mrs. SEN (India), speaking as the representative of India, noted that the representative of Lebanon had referred to the resolution on political rights adopted by the Commission at its preceding session (E/1712), drawing particular attention to the words "a convention...similar to the Convention signed at Bogota". That phrase did not mean that the text to be adopted should be identical with the relevant part of the Bogota Convention. If such had been the Commission's intention, it could simply have adopted an identical text, instead of requesting the Secretary-General to prepare a draft convention for consideration at its next session.

As regards the necessity of ensuring support of the draft convention by the Economic and Social Council, Mrs. Sen saw no reason to suppose that the Council would reject a draft convention couched in liberal terms. She herself was confident that the progressive elements in the Council would outweigh the reactionary elements, and that a liberal convention could be adopted.

There were certain weaknesses inherent in a negative formula, such as that proposed by the United States delegation. A convention in negative terms might well provide reactionary Governments with an excuse for inaction; as long as their constitutions contained no provisions denying political rights to women, they would see no necessity for specific legislation guaranteeing such rights. A positive wording was therefore more desirable. She could not support the contention that the United States text should be adopted because it might receive more support from the Governments; the Commission's primary duty was to promote and protect the rights of women in every possible way, not merely to fall in with the desires of the majority of Governments.

/Much of

Much of the work of implementing the convention would be done by women's non-governmental organizations throughout the world. Such organizations were already fighting to achieve broader political rights for women, and had shown enthusiastic interest in the Commission's debates. The Commission should endeavour to encourage them in their valuable work; it could hardly hope to assist them in obtaining more extensive rights for women by adopting a convention which, for practical purposes, would guarantee no rights at all.

With respect to the Cuban proposal, Mrs. Sen expressed satisfaction that it contemplated the retention of article 3 of the Committee's text, since the omission of that article would constitute a departure from the principles set forth in the Declaration of Human Rights.

Mrs. KHOURY (Lebanon) thought it essential to adopt a realistic approach to the problem. Obtaining ratification of an international convention was an exceedingly difficult task. If the Commission hoped to have the present document ratified by at least 65 States, it must take care not to ask the impossible. She felt hopeful, rather than pessimistic, about the Economic and Social Council's attitude toward the draft convention, but the convention could succeed only if it was couched in general terms and made adaptable to any legislative system.

Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America) recalled that her Government had been one of those which had pressed for the preparation of a convention at the Commission's preceding session. She felt strongly that the time had now come to adopt such a convention. But it was essential that it should be a strong, clear and practical document, capable of winning support from Member Governments. The Commission's chief obligation was to achieve for women the basic rights to vote and to be elected to office, in countries in which they were still denied those rights. The purpose of her amendment, therefore, was not to weaken the cause of women in the struggle to attain political rights, but simply to give priority to the most fundamental of those rights.

Such a phrase as "public functions" might be subject to widely varying interpretations in different countries, and its use in a convention might conceivably deter some States from ratifying it.

Miss LAVALLE URBINA (Mexico) preferred that the Commission should adopt the language of the Bogota Convention, which she considered simpler and clearer than the text submitted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Resolutions. She supported the Cuban representative's proposal to retain article 3 of the Committee's text.

Miss SUTHERLAND (United Kingdom) said that she would report to her Government that the consensus of opinion among the delegates on the Commission appeared to be in favour of a convention. She realized the importance of the language in which it was drafted, but she did not understand the division of opinion amongst members of the Commission on the use of a positive or negative form. She could not see any reason against the use of the latter.

It was important that the text of the convention should be concise, clear and acceptable to all. The Bogota Convention did not seem negative because it started with an affirmation of the right to vote. With regard to the text produced by the Committee on Resolutions, she did not think that the phrases "public office" and "public functions" were good. They had a different meaning in the United Kingdom from the meaning they had in the United States, and would require more clarification. The summary records of the debate in the Commission would make the position clear to the Economic and Social Council, and enable it to reach its own conclusions.

In reply to the Indian representative's statement, she said that she thought representatives were in <sup>the</sup> position of having to try to accommodate Governments. Surely it was desirable to produce a convention susceptible of the same interpretation and calculated to secure acceptance by the maximum number of countries.

The convention was supposed to deal with political rights, and it therefore was undesirable to widen its content. The Commission should keep to the specific field decided upon in the previous year. As, however, a convention was intended to be ratified, it would be advisable to submit the text to jurists experienced in international law. It should be remembered that the Secretariat had originally recommended postponing action on it until the preparation of an international covenant on human rights had been completed.

It was her personal view that, if the Economic and Social Council agreed that there should be such a convention, it was the Commission's duty to see that its terms were such as would be acceptable to governments. While she did not wish to move an amendment, she would like to suggest, in view of the limited number of Governments represented both on the Commission and on the Economic and Social Council, that the Council should submit the draft convention to Member Governments for comment before proceeding further.

Mrs. POPOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that it was obvious from the discussion that the Commission would be unable to achieve any concrete action. The USSR <sup>resolution</sup> (E/CN.6/L.30) had been rejected, and now it appeared that the United States representative was not really in favour of a convention at all, and so was trying to include a negative formula which would place the political rights of women at the mercy of national authorities. It was worthy of note that no political rights were to be set out in the convention.

An effort was being made to induce states to give women political rights. She wondered how long it was going to take to achieve that end. The USSR had granted women their rights when many of them were still illiterate. The results had justified that step. She could not believe that the Commission only wanted to mark time.

Mrs. TSALDARIS (Greece) said that she was in favour of the strongest and most complete convention possible, because such a convention would be of particular assistance to countries where women did not as yet enjoy political rights. At the same time, she attached considerable importance to obtaining

/the largest



the largest possible number of favourable votes to back the Commission's decision. In that connexion, she reminded the Commission of its resolution on the status of women in public law (E/CN.6/L.45/Rev.1). She wondered if that could not be used to supplement the Bogota Convention, and provide a solution to the problem of the holding of public office, and exercise of public functions by women. The legal experts, who would be responsible for examining the final text and who would be representing their Governments, would be able to decide the matter, while taking into consideration the resolution on public functions, with a view to drafting the final text of the convention.

Mrs. SEN (India) noted that the representative of Lebanon appeared to want to define the non-governmental organizations as bodies responsible for ensuring that Governments implemented the Commission's decisions. She thought that those organizations should also try to ensure that governments accepted the principles involved.

The Commission's terms of reference included the raising of the status of women in the political field. Representatives were not entirely limited by the policy of their governments; they were entitled to speak as women also, in the protection of women's rights.

She had consulted an eminent jurist about the phraseology of the draft convention, and he had assured her that the positive form was more suitable than the negative, and that Governments might be expected to interpret clauses such as that containing reference to "public office" and "public functions" in a reasonable manner. She thought that it would be better to postpone drafting the text, and refer it to some eminent lawyers rather than limit its application. She could not accept the use of the word "national" instead of "public" because the former word had a very narrow connotation in many countries.

In view of the fact that many of the countries which had signed the Bogota Convention had still not granted women the right to vote, she saw no reason for producing a text identical with it.

Mrs. QUERY



Mrs. QUERY (Haiti) thought it was possible to lay too much emphasis on shades of meaning. The important point was to get something done, and a positive form of wording was always more constructive. There was a hope that, if much was asked, at least a little would be granted. She suggested the addition of a considerandum mentioning the Bogota Convention.

Miss PELETIER (Netherlands) agreed that it was important to provide help to less advanced countries. But the political rights mentioned should not be limited to the national plane. In view of the experience gained in some countries, such as Lebanon, the right of election to municipal bodies should be mentioned. She suggested that the words "to national office" should be removed from the United States amendment, and be replaced by the words "to publicly elected bodies".

Mrs. DALY (Australia) agreed with the representative of India, and said that she would vote for the text produced by the Committee on Resolutions. If the resolution was approved by the General Assembly, the Australian Government, which was also a federal body, would have to examine the convention with great care.

Mrs. SEN (India), speaking as Chairman of the Committee on Resolutions, read the first paragraph of the resolution adopted by the Commission in the previous year (E/1712, p. 4), which referred to a Convention "similar to" the Bogota Convention. She thought that the debt to the Bogota Convention had already been clearly acknowledged, but saw no objection to repeating that acknowledgment.

Miss SUTHERLAND (United Kingdom) said that she was not taking issue between the positive and the negative forms of expression. She only wanted the text to be clear and easily interpreted. With regard to the United States amendment, she would make the same reservation as the Netherlands representative. Different words were used in articles 1 and 3 of the resolution, which stated that women should be "entitled to vote", and "hold public office", and in article 2, which said that women should be "eligible for election". She thought it would be better to use the same word in all three articles.

/Mrs. de GONZALES

Mrs. de GONZALES (Cuba) thought there was a large degree of agreement on principle, and suggested that article 3 of the draft convention be altered to follow the Bogotá phraseology.

Mrs. GOLDMAN (United States of America) said that her amendment to the draft convention was tactical rather than substantive as articles 1 and 2 of the Committee's draft raised no difficulties for countries with a federal type of Government.

Mrs. KHOURY (Lebanon) moved that the Commission should vote on the proposals before it.

Mrs. de GONZALEZ (Cuba) withdrew her amendment.

Mrs. SEN (India) called for a roll-call vote on the draft produced by the Committee on Resolutions and on the United States amendment.

The CHAIRMAN, speaking as representative of France, said that she would favour the draft produced by the Committee on Resolutions. Women could not be said to have full political rights if they were unable to exercise public functions. In support of her statement she quoted the text of Article 21 of the Declaration of Human Rights.

Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) pointed out that the problem under discussion was too complex to allow of reaching a rapid decision, and suggested that the vote should be deferred until the afternoon meeting.

Mrs. KHOURY (Lebanon) withdrew her motion for a vote.

It was decided that the debate should be resumed at the afternoon meeting.

The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.