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## COMMISSION ON STATUS OF WOMEN, CONCLUDING THIRTY-NINTH SESSION, APPROVES DRAFT PLATFORM FOR ACTION FOR BEIJING CONFERENCE

### Draft Seeks to Empower Women, Covers 12 Areas of Concern

A draft platform for action to empower women for the benefit of all was approved Friday night by the Commission on the Status of Women for submission to the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing from 4 to 15 September.

The Commission is acting as the preparatory body for the Conference which will focus on action for equality, development and peace. It extended its session, which began on 15 March, by three days in order to finalize the draft document aimed at establishing a basic group of priority actions to be carried out over the next five years. It contains recommendations in 12 areas of concern, relating to the impact on women of poverty; education; health; violence; armed conflict; economic structures; power sharing and decision-making; mechanisms to promote the advancement of women; human rights; the media; the environment; and the situation of girls.

Bracketed language -- indicating text that is still pending agreement -- is peppered throughout the draft, with certain references consistently placed in brackets, including those relating to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights that were previously agreed to at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. Other references that are in dispute include qualifying human rights as "universal"; references to foreign occupation and alien domination; the term "equity" as opposed to, or in conjunction with, "equality"; references to religious ethical values, cultural background and philosophical convictions; and references to sexual orientation.

In addition, the term 'gender' is asterisked pending the issuance of a definition of the term. The Commission decided to form a contact group mandated to seek agreement on a common understanding of the word 'gender' in the context of the draft platform. The Group will begin its work on 15 May and is expected to complete it in four weeks. It will be chaired by the Commission Rapporteur, Selma Ashipala (Namibia). The report of the contact group will be transmitted to the Conference and will be considered during

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pre-Conference informal consultations, to be held on Saturday and Sunday, 2 and 3 September.

In a closing statement, Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the Fourth Conference on Women, said the draft platform for action made it very clear that one issue -- the issue of equality between women and men -- was an accepted principle which was non-negotiable. A complete revolution was needed to transfer a fair share of resources into the hands of women. Women worldwide hoped that the Beijing Conference would make a difference. Their hope challenged participants to reconsider all brackets so that they would not become a barrier to the advancement of women, she said.

Speaking on the draft platform for action on behalf of the "Group of 77" and China, the representative of Pakistan said that the draft platform's "mission statement" contained essential elements, but some important themes had not been adequately addressed. While keeping it concise, the draft should be strengthened through greater emphasis on development and peace, he said.

The representative of Peru stated that her country's position with regard to health was that the reproductive rights of women excluded abortion. The representative of Guatemala reiterated her country's reservations on the word gender pending the definition of that term. The representative of Mexico expressed concern over the high degree of disagreement on the draft.

The Commission also decided to transmit to the World Conference, a draft outline which could serve as a basis for a "Beijing declaration", along with texts submitted by the Group of 77, the United States, Canada and the European Union. It also adopted the provisional agenda and proposed organization of work of the World Conference, as orally revised. The Commission approved, as orally amended, the draft provisional rules of procedure of the Conference. Several rules were amended to reflect the full participation of the European Community in the Conference.

The representative of the United States, supported by Canada, said that the methods for participation of the European Community continually posed questions, adding that to recognize representation of the European Union by two different sets of representatives at the same time would only disadvantage other delegations. The representative of the Philippines, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and supported by Nigeria, said she supported the text on the understanding that similar regional bodies would receive such treatment at future events.

The Commission also adopted the report of its current session, as orally revised. Over the course of the current session, the Commission approved a draft resolution concerning accreditation for non-governmental organizations, and adopted resolutions on mainstreaming the human rights of women, and the release of women and children hostages before the opening of the World Conference.

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Before concluding the session, the Commission Chairperson, Patricia Licuanan (Philippines) said "I cannot say honestly that I enjoyed the past three weeks, but I hope that it was an enlightening, enriching and productive experience for all of us."

A summary of the draft platform for action approved by the Commission as well as other resolutions adopted over the course of the session follows.

#### Draft Platform for Action

The draft platform for action, to be submitted to the World Conference for adoption, reflects a review of progress since the 1985 third world conference on Women in Nairobi, and seeks to hasten the removal of all remaining obstacles to women's full and equal participation in all spheres of life, to protect women's human rights and to integrate women's concerns into all aspects of sustainable development. It is aimed at establishing a basic group of priority actions to be carried out over the next five years.

The draft, which contains a mission statement and a global framework, identifies strategic objectives and actions in 12 critical areas, and discusses institutional and financial arrangements at the national, regional and international levels to promote the advancement of women. Recommendations in each area of concern are addressed to various players in the international community, particularly governments, international financial and development institutions, bilateral donors, the private sector, academic and research institutions, non-governmental organizations and the mass media.

Bracketed language -- that is, language still subject to agreement -- is peppered throughout the text, with certain references consistently placed in brackets. For example, in addition to making recommendations to the private sector, bracketed proposals would also address them to transnational corporations. Other references that are in dispute throughout the text include qualifying human rights as "universal"; references to foreign occupation and alien domination; the term "equity" as opposed to "equality"; references to "religious ethical values, cultural background and philosophical convictions"; and references to "sexual orientation". References to displaced women are preceded by the term "internally" in brackets.

In addition, the term "gender" is asterisked pending the issuance of a definition of the term requested by a delegation.

According to agreed language in the draft's mission statement, a sustained and long-term commitment is essential so that women and men can work together for themselves, for their children and for society to meet the challenges of the next century. The draft platform emphasizes that women and men share common concerns that can only be addressed by working together and in partnership with men towards the common goal of gender equality around the world.

Agreement is lacking in the mission statement on the need for adequate, new and additional resources for the implementation of the draft platform. Also still subject to agreement is the assertion that "the human rights of

women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights".

The global framework of the draft platform is contained in chapter II. It provides a background for the recommendations contained in other parts of the draft platform, stressing the importance of agreements reached at United Nations conferences held over the current decade dealing with social and economic development.

Agreed language in that chapter discusses recent international economic developments that have disproportionately affected women and children. Structural adjustment programmes, which were beneficial in the long run, had led to a reduction in social expenditures, thereby adversely affecting women. "This is exacerbated when responsibilities for basic social services have shifted from governments to women."

The chapter on the global framework states that women often have no choice but to take employment that lacks long-term job security or involves dangerous working conditions, to work in unprotected home-based production or to go unemployed. Many women worked in unremunerated or under-remunerated jobs. The number of women living in poverty has increased in most areas, and special attention must be paid to the plight of poor rural women. Many households are headed by females, and those were often the poorest due to such factors as wage discrimination.

According to the agreed text, the boundaries of the gender division of labour between productive and reproductive roles were gradually being crossed as women had started to enter formerly male-dominated areas of work and men have started to accept greater responsibilities for domestic tasks, including child care. However, changes in women's roles have been much greater and more rapid than changes in men's roles.

Women were not adequately represented in decision-making structures, and represented an average of 10 per cent of all legislators worldwide. "The United Nations is no exception. Fifty years after its creation, the United Nations is continuing to deny itself the benefits of women's leadership by their underrepresentation at decision-making levels within the Secretariat and specialized agencies."

Due to the lack of equality and the unbalanced distribution of remunerated and unremunerated work between women and men, the care of children, the sick and the elderly falls disproportionately on women, according to the draft. The impact of the AIDS pandemic is also discussed, with the text stating that among new cases, women are twice as likely to be infected than men. Young women and adolescents are particularly vulnerable. The rate of transmission of AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases is increasing at an alarming rate among women and girls, especially in developing countries. Special measures must be taken to ensure that young women have the life skills needed to participate in all levels of leadership. "It will be critical for the international community to demonstrate a new commitment to the future -- a commitment to inspiring a new generation of women and men to work together for a more just society."

Several bracketed provisions in the text refer to human rights, including those stating that "the universal nature of these human rights and freedoms is beyond question". Grave violations of human rights of women occurring in times of armed conflict are referred to, with brackets around the examples of forced pregnancy and forced abortion.

Also in brackets is the text on arms trafficking and trading, which it states reduces resources for social development. Moreover, debt burden has forced many developing countries to undertake structural adjustment policies that are detrimental to their social development. "Accelerated economic growth, although necessary for social development, does not by itself improve the quality of life of the population; indeed, it can aggravate social inequality and marginalization", states the disputed text.

Other issues still subject to agreement in the global framework are the role of women in the family, including the "social significance of maternity". Text on the role of religion is also not agreed, including that relating to the need for "a moral and ethical climate that prevents all forms of corruption in society and exploitation of women".

Also in dispute is a reference to unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, particularly in industrialized countries as the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment and a matter of grave concern.

Another proposal which has yet to be agreed on would describe the Fourth World Conference as a "Conference of commitments" and would provide for annexing specific national commitments to the draft platform for action.

All titles of the critical areas of concern, Chapter III, remain in brackets. They relate generally to the issues of poverty; education; health; violence; armed conflict; economic structures; power sharing and decision-making; mechanisms to promote the advancement of women; human rights; the media; the environment; and the girl child.

According to bracketed text on strategic objectives and actions, Chapter IV, "the actions are directed to improving the status and situation of all women and therefore recognize that many women face particular barriers because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation or disability, or because they are indigenous people". Particular barriers, states the disputed text, also exist for refugee, migrant and displaced women, as well as for those who are affected by environmental disasters, serious and infectious diseases, addiction and various forms of violence against women.

Strategic objective A concerns "the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women". It states that sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable is only possible through improving the economic, social, political, legal and cultural status of women.

Among actions recommended to be taken by governments is that they should analyze, from a gender perspective, the impact of policies and programmes.

Governments should develop policies and programmes to promote equitable distribution of food within the household; and restructure and target the allocation of public expenditures to promote women's economic opportunities and equal and more equitable access to productive resources. Disputed language calls for the introduction of measures for the empowerment of women migrants through the easing of stringent and restrictive migration policies and for the realization of the human rights of internally displaced persons.

Still heavily bracketed is a series of actions called for from multilateral financial institutions, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. They relate to the allocation of resources for the eradication of poverty targeting particularly women; cancelling or reducing the foreign debt burden of developing countries to help them finance development programmes which include the advancement of women; and the creation of an enabling environment to allow women to build sustainable livelihoods.

Actions recommended to be taken by non-governmental organizations are still to be agreed upon. Language in dispute states that governments should not abrogate their responsibility for providing for social well-being by shifting social responsibility to those organizations. It is also stressed, in brackets, that women's human rights to equal access to and control of land, property and credit must be upheld, regardless of customary laws, traditions and practices related to inheritance and marriage.

Several references to indigenous people, including a call to governments to enact laws to prevent the passing of their resources into the hands of the private sector and transnational corporations, remain bracketed in the section on poverty. Among actions agreed are recommendations to statistical organizations to collect gender and age-disaggregated data on poverty; and to devise statistical means to make visible the full extent of women's work to the national economy, including their contribution in the unremunerated and domestic sectors.

Strategic objective B addresses education as an essential tool for achieving the goals of full equality, development and peace. Agreed text on ensuring equal access to education includes a recommendation that governments provide, by the year 2000, universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 80 per cent of primary school-age children; closing the gender gap in primary and secondary school education by the year 2005; and universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015. In order to eradicate illiteracy among women by the year 2000, the text recommends, among others, reducing the female illiteracy rate to at least half the 1990 level, with emphasis on rural women, migrant women, refugee and internally displaced women and women with disabilities.

To improve women's access to science and technology, women and girls should benefit from training in those areas, according to agreed language. Governments, educational authorities and other educational and academic institutions should aim to develop non-discriminatory education and training. Actions to be taken include the development of appropriate education and information programmes, with due respect to multilingualism, that make the

public aware of the importance of non-discriminatory education for children and the equal sharing of family responsibilities between girls and boys.

Also agreed upon was the need for multilateral development organizations, bilateral donors and foundations to maintain or increase funding levels for education in structural adjustment and economic recovery programmes. Governments, educational institutions and communities are called upon to provide support for child care and other services to enable mothers to continue their schooling.

With respect to discrimination in girls' access to education, the bracketed text refers to the problems of early marriages and sexual harassment. "The lack of sexual and reproductive education has a profound impact on women and men", states the contentious text. Other provisions would call on governments to ensure the rights of women and girls to freedom of conscience in educational institutions by repealing any discriminatory laws or legislation based on religion, race or culture.

Also yet to be agreed on is text which would call for the creation of integrated services relating to youth sexuality, taking into account the importance of such education and services to personal development and self-esteem, as well as the urgent need to avoid unwanted pregnancy, the spreading of sexually-transmitted diseases, and phenomena such as sexual violence and abuse. Another contentious proposal calls for ensuring that gender, culture and religious diversity are respected in educational institutions.

Strategic objective C concerns inequalities in access to health and related services. That section, which was the object of protracted negotiations, still contains much disputed language. The Commission is sending in brackets to Beijing references to many issues contained as consensus language in the Cairo Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted by the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. Among those are definitions of reproductive health and reproductive rights, references to unsafe abortions, sexual health, the right of women to control their own fertility and contraceptives. Also, throughout the section on health the word gender remains in brackets.

The section recommends actions concerning increasing women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate free or affordable and good quality health care; strengthening preventive programmes that address threats to women's health; gender-sensitive multisectoral initiatives that address sexually transmitted disease, the AIDS/HIV pandemic and other sexual and reproductive health issues; promoting research and information dissemination on women's health; and increasing resources and monitoring follow-up for women's health.

Among actions recommended to governments, the United Nations system, health professions, research institutions, non-governmental organizations, donors, pharmaceutical industries and the media, is a call for support and fund of social, economic, political and cultural research on how gender-based inequalities affect women's health.

The problem of violence against women, dealt with in section D, contains agreed language which describes that phenomenon as a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women. Violence against women derives essentially from cultural patterns, particularly the harmful effects of certain traditional practices and all acts of extremism linked to race, sex, language or religion that perpetrate women's lower status. Images in the media of violence against women, particularly those depicting rape or sexual slavery as well as the use of women and girls as sex objects, including pornography, are seen as contributing factors to such violence.

Agreed text calls on governments to, among others, adopt measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of men and women, and to eliminate cultural practices based on stereotyped roles for men and women. Governments are called upon to provide well-funded shelters and relief support for girls and women subjected to violence, as well as other counselling services and legal aid. There is also agreement on the need for counselling for the perpetrators of violence.

Among the bracketed provisions in the text are those that describe acts of violence against women as including "terrorism, forced sterilization and forced abortion, coercive/forced use of contraceptives, female foeticide/prenatal sex selection and female infanticide". A bracketed recommendation would call for eliminating patterns of media presentation that generate violence. Special measures are called for to assist female victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking, with a bracketed call for resources to heal such victims.

Strategic objective E, which is heavily bracketed, concerns the impacts of armed conflict on women. In the introduction to the section, one of the few paragraphs free of brackets calls for the promotion of an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes addressing armed or other conflicts so that before decisions are taken an analysis is made of their effects on women and men, respectively.

Among actions to be taken by governments at the international level, disputed language calls on them to make sure that opportunities are made available for qualified women to participate in all United Nations forums and peace activities at ambassadorial and decision-making levels, including the United Nations Secretariat.

Sub-sections of strategic objective E address, among other issues, the promotion of non-violent forms of conflict resolution and the reduction of the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations; the promotion of women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace; and the provision of assistance to the women of the colonies. The heading of another sub-section is still to be decided among the following formulations: either "reduce military expenditures and control the availability of armaments" or "reduce and eliminate the availability of instruments of violence against women".

Throughout the section references to forced pregnancy as well as to foreign occupation remain bracketed. Also to be agreed upon are calls to promoting the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, especially

nuclear weapons; to taking measures to alleviate the negative impact of economic sanctions on women and children; and to eliminating and abstaining from adopting unilateral coercive measures that go against the population of affected countries.

There is agreement on a call to governments and organizations to condemn the systematic practice of rape and other forms of inhuman and degrading treatment of women as a deliberate instrument of war and ethnic cleansing. Still contentious is language by which governments and organizations would declare that rape in the conduct of armed conflict can constitute a war crime and a crime against humanity and under certain circumstances may constitute an act of genocide.

Strategic objective F concerns women and economic structures and addresses their access to and participation in the productive process. The introduction to the section states that insufficient attention to gender analysis has meant that women's contributions and concerns remain too often ignored in economic structures, such as financial and labour markets and in families and households. As a result, many policies and programmes may continue to contribute to inequalities between women and men. To fully realize equality between women and men in their contribution to the economies, active efforts are required for recognizing equal appreciation and influence in society of the work, experience, knowledge and values of both women and men.

Agreed language calls on governments to enact legislation to guarantee the rights of women and men to equal pay for equal work or work of equal value; to ensure that policies related to trade agreements do not aggressively affect women's new and traditional economic activities; and to pay special attention to women's needs when disseminating market, trade and resource information.

Still pending agreement are references to the empowerment of documented migrant women; to ensuring compliance by transnational corporations with national laws and codes; to policies to extend the protection of labour laws and social security provisions for those who do paid work in the home; to encouraging men to seek employment in the social sector; to adopting policies to extend the protection of labour and social security laws to part-time and temporary jobs; and to enact laws that grant parental leave and parental benefits to both women and men.

"The power relations that impede women's attainment of fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public", states section G, on power sharing and decision-making. Other agreed text recommends that governments commit themselves to establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies. Political parties should consider examining party structures and procedures to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women. Gender balance in the composition of delegations to the United Nations and other international forums is also called for, while the Organization is called upon to develop mechanisms to nominate women candidates for appointment to senior posts in the United Nations system.

Text still subject to agreement would call on the United Nations to adopt new policies and measures relating to all contracts in order to achieve overall gender parity in employment, particularly at the professional level, by the year 2000. Another contentious provision would call on the Organization to monitor progress towards achieving the Secretary-General's target of 50 per cent but at least 40 per cent of managerial and decision-making positions to be held by women by the year 2000.

Section H, on mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women, states that successive international conferences have underscored the need to take gender factors into account in policy and programme planning, but "in many instances this has not been done". The agreed text calls for governments to ensure that responsibility for the advancement of women is invested at the highest possible level.

All recommendations to regional and international organizations, particularly the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), are in brackets. They include providing financial and advisory assistance to national machinery and strengthening international mechanisms to promote the advancement of women.

Bracketed recommendations to Governments would have them promote a visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes. Also subject to agreement is a recommendation that national machinery focus on legal reform with regard to the family, conditions of employment, social security, income tax and a culture favourable to equality, among others. Contentious text also calls for promoting the gender perspective in legal reforms, including with regard to employment, social security, taxation and education.

In order to generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation, the text calls for ensuring that all statistics related to individuals are collected, compiled, analyzed and presented by sex and age, and that they reflect problems and questions concerning women and men in society.

Bracketed recommendations call for developing a more comprehensive knowledge of work and employment through efforts to measure and better understand the type, extent and distribution of unremunerated work, particularly work done for family farms or businesses. Also contentious is a recommendation that data collection be improved on access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, maternal care and family planning, with special priority for adolescent mothers and care for the elderly.

Agreement has yet to be reached on recommendations to multilateral development financial institutions and bilateral donors, with a bracketed call for supporting the development of the capacities of developing countries and States with economies in transition to fully measure work done by women.

Strategic objective I deals with lack of awareness of and commitment to recognized human rights of women. It states that in order to protect human

rights of women it is necessary to avoid as far as possible the resort to reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Also, no reservation should be incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention. Language in brackets states that gender based violence and all forms of sexual harassment, prostitution, pornography, sex slavery, and exploitation, including those resulting from cultural prejudice, racism and racial discrimination, xenophobia, ethnic cleansing, religious and anti-religious extremism and international trafficking of women and children are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person and must be eliminated.

Among actions recommended are that governments should develop a comprehensive human rights education programme to raise awareness among women of their human rights and among others of the human rights of women. There is a call to United Nations bodies to give full and sustained attention to the human rights of women in the exercise of their respective mandates to promote universal respect for and protection of all human rights, civil, cultural, economic, political and social, including the right to development.

Under a sub-section on achieving legal literacy, governments are called upon to fully publicize information on the existence of mechanisms for seeking to redress violations of human rights of women. They are also called upon to promote education on the equality of women and men in public and private lives, including their rights within the family and international human rights instruments. There is a call for measures to ensure that refugee and displaced women, migrant women, and women migrant workers are made aware of their human rights and of the recourse mechanisms available to them.

Strategic objective J states that the lack of gender sensitivity in the media is evidenced by the failure to eliminate the gender-based stereotyping that can be found in media organizations. Bracketed references describe the "excessive control or influence of transnational corporations".

Agreed language in the text calls for encouraging media organizations, to the extent consistent with freedom of expression, to increase the number of programmes for and by women. There is no agreement, however, on a recommendation that governments encourage the participation of women in the development of "professional guidelines and codes of conduct" or "appropriate regulatory mechanisms" to promote non-stereotyped portrayals of women by the media. Non-governmental organizations and media associations would be called upon to encourage the establishment of media watch groups.

According to a bracketed proposal, governments and international organizations should "encourage the media to refrain from being a tool for presenting women as inferior beings and exploited as a sexual object and commodity, rather than as a creative human person". There is also no agreement on a proposal to call for the establishment of professional guidelines and codes of conduct that address violence, degrading or pornographic materials concerning women in the media, including advertising. The media is called upon, in another bracketed proposal, to disseminate

materials on women as caring mothers and nurturers of happy families. References to the development of new alternative media to disseminate information about women's concerns are also bracketed.

Strategic objective K concerns women and environment. It states that recent United Nations global conferences on development have acknowledged that sustainable development policies that do not involve women and men alike will not succeed in the long run. Women's experiences and contributions to an ecologically sound environment must therefore be central to the agenda for the twenty-first century.

Agreed language in the actions recommended to governments include a call for measures to be taken to reduce risks to women from identified environmental hazards at home, at work and in other environments, including through appropriate applications of clean technologies. Governments and organizations are called upon to conduct analysis of the structural links between gender relations, environment and development.

Disputed language in that section includes reference to unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, as the major cause of the deterioration of the global environment. Also pending agreement is reference to the fact that poverty and environmental degradation are closely related. Still in brackets is a paragraph in which women's commitment to create a new development paradigm that integrates environmental sustainability with gender equality and justice is stressed. A call for national legislation to respect indigenous women's traditional knowledge, as envisaged by the Convention on Biological Diversity, including safeguarding their intellectual property rights, also remains in brackets.

Section L, which was added to the original text over the course of the current session, addresses the situation of girls. References in brackets discuss harmful attitudes and practices such as female genital mutilation, son preference, early marriage, prostitution, sexual abuse and discrimination against girls in food allocation.

Also bracketed in the text is language agreed upon at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, including recognition that full attention should be given to meeting the educational and service needs of adolescents to enable them to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality. Other disputed recommendations call for Governments to pass and enforce legislation that would guarantee equal succession and inheritance rights of children regardless of sex; and to take steps so that traditional and religious attire is not a basis of discrimination in educational institutions. Another contentious proposal would call for measures aimed at abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.

While the objective to "eliminate the economic exploitation of child labour and protect young girls at work" is bracketed, the recommendations to governments in that section are not. They include defining a minimum age for employment as well as strengthening legislation governing the work of children and providing for penalties to ensure enforcement of such legislation.

Chapter V concerns institutional arrangements for follow-up to the World Conference. Agreed text states that as soon as possible, preferably by the end of the year, governments should develop strategies to implement the draft platform. By the end of 1996 they should have developed their strategies or plans of action. Those implementation strategies should be comprehensive, with time-bound targets, benchmarks for monitoring as well as proposals for allocating or reallocating resources for implementation.

Recommendations are also made for sub-regional and regional action, including an agreed call for the Economic and Social Council to consider reviewing the institutional capacity of the regional commissions to deal with gender issues in light of the draft platform. Regional offices of the United Nations specialized agencies should develop and publicize a plan of action for implementing the draft platform for action.

On international follow-up, the text contains a bracketed proposal to give consideration to establishing a high-level post in the office of the Secretary-General with the mandate of advising the Secretary-General in his oversight of system-wide integration of gender concerns throughout the United Nations system. Another bracketed proposal would call for a mid-term world conference on women to assess the implementation of the draft platform for action.

Among the agreed recommendations for action by the Economic and Social Council, the draft platform recommends that it be invited to review the mandate of the Commission on the Status of Women, taking into account, among others, the need for follow-up to the Conference. A bracketed proposal would have the Commission play a central role in monitoring implementation of the draft platform, with "necessary financial support" to enable it to coordinate United Nations efforts in that regard.

Also in brackets is a proposal to strengthen the monitoring body of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women through the provision of regular budget resources, including sufficient meeting time for its work. In addition, agreement is yet to be reached on a proposed request that the Secretary-General ensure more effective functioning of the Division for the Advancement of Women by providing sufficient financial and human resources within the regular budget.

The entire section of the draft dealing with the INSTRAW and UNIFEM is in brackets. Among the proposals, the text states that the future roles and functioning of those two entities be considered in light of a decision to be taken by the General Assembly at its next session on the proposal to merge them.

The chapter on financial arrangements, chapter VI, states that insufficient financial and human resources have contributed to the slow progress to date in implementing the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and that a political commitment is required to make those resources available for the empowerment of women. That will require the integration of a gender perspective in budgetary decisions on policies and programmes, as well as the adequate financing of specific programmes for

securing equality between women and men. Bracketed language adds that the mobilization of additional resources, both public and private, including from innovative sources of funding, may also be necessary.

It is stressed that the primary responsibility for implementing the strategic objectives of the draft platform for action rests with governments. However, adequate financial resources should be committed at the international level for the implementation of the draft platform for action in the developing countries. Countries involved in development cooperation should conduct a critical analysis of their assistance programmes so as to improve the quality and effectiveness of aid through the integration of a gender approach.

There is a call for the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development regarding debt management and reduction to be implemented in order to facilitate the realization of the objectives of the draft platform. There is also a call to those countries interested in allocating 20 per cent of official development assistance (ODA) and 20 per cent of the national budget to basic social programmes, as proposed in the "20/20" initiative, to take into account a gender perspective.

There are three alternatives to a paragraph concerning UNIFEM and INSTRAW. In all versions the fact that those bodies have special roles to play in the empowerment of women is recognized and an increase in resources for their activities is called for.

The need to renew, reform and revitalize the various parts of the United Nations system, especially the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Secretariat, is stressed. Governing bodies within the United Nations system are encouraged to give special consideration to the implementation of the draft platform. Language in brackets states that the mobilization of additional resources from the Organization's budget in order to implement the draft platform may also be necessary.

#### Other Actions by Commission

The accreditation of non-governmental organizations to the Conference and its preparatory process was a central task of the Commission's current session. Matters related to non-governmental organizations were discussed by a special working group formed for that purpose, and the Commission's efforts culminated with the approval of a decision by a roll-call vote of 40 in favour to none against, with China abstaining.

Under the terms of that text, to be sent to the General Assembly for adoption, the Assembly would authorize the Economic and Social Council to decide on all pending proposals for the accreditation of non-governmental organizations to the Fourth World Conference on Women and its preparatory process. The Commission extended the deadline for non-governmental organizations to submit applications for accreditation to 28 April. The Conference secretariat was requested to inform non-governmental organizations that had not been recommended for accreditation to the Conference and its preparatory process of the reasons for that. The organizations concerned will

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then be given a chance to provide additional information on their qualifications for accreditation.

After evaluating that information, the secretariat will provide two lists to the Economic and Social Council for its consideration: one listing non-governmental organizations that the secretariat did not recommend for accreditation, along with the reasons; and the second, listing those that appeared to have met the criteria for accreditation. The Council will then decide on all pending proposals for accreditation at its substantive session, to be held in Geneva in July.

The representative of China, in explaining his country's position on the vote, said that China, as the Conference's host, welcomed the non-governmental organizations that were committed to the advancement of women. However, some countries had insisted on accreditation for a few organizations which had nothing to do with the Conference but were trying to undermine the sovereignty of certain countries, he said.

On 15 March, the Commission approved a list of 1,326 non-governmental organizations for accreditation to the Conference and its preparatory process, in addition to those which already have consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. It established the special working group in response to questions raised concerning five non-governmental organizations on the list recommended for accreditation by the Secretariat, as well as non-governmental organizations which had applied but had not been included on the list. On 20 March, the Commission, acting on the recommendation of the working group, approved the accreditation of the five non-governmental organizations in question.

Four of those five organizations are the United States-based Catholics for a Free Choice and its sister organizations in Mexico, Uruguay and Brazil. The Holy See had objected to their accreditation, stating that although they used the word 'Catholic', they publicly opposed the position of the Catholic Church. Armenia had expressed a reservation about the fifth non-governmental organization, the Armenian Relief Society.

About half of the non-governmental organizations approved so far are from Europe and North America, and the rest from Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and western Asia.

Non-governmental organizations will participate in the NGO Forum, to be held parallel to the World Conference, from 30 August to 8 September. Addressing the Commission, the Convenor of the Forum expressed the concern of non-governmental organizations at a recent decision by China to change the venue for that event. The representative of China said that there were structural flaws in the original site, so it had been necessary to change the venue. He said the new site was near the airport, which was a little far from the Conference site, but China would provide shuttle buses between the two locations. He added that the new venue would have more space for meetings and exhibitions.

(more)

Under the terms of texts recommended for adoption by the Council, it would:

-- Urge the Secretary-General to implement fully the strategic plan of action for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (1995-2000) and to accord greater priority to recruiting and promoting women in posts subject to geographical distribution;

-- Decide that the Commission should establish a working group at its next session to elaborate a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which would introduce the right of individuals to petition the treaty-monitoring body directly in cases of violations of women's human rights; and

-- Urge the international community and international financial organizations to intensify their efforts to provide assistance to Palestinian women.

By a vote of 27 in favour to none against, with 14 abstentions, the Commission adopted a resolution urging the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts before the opening of the Fourth World Conference on Women. It requested the Secretary-General to inform the World Conference on progress made in implementing the resolution.

Under the terms of a resolution on mainstreaming the human rights of women, the Commission requested the Secretary-General to see to the preparation of a long-term joint work plan on the human rights of women for the Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women.

By other resolutions, the Commission:

-- Condemned the abhorrent practice of rape and abuse of women and children in the areas of armed conflict in the former Yugoslavia;

-- Called for special attention to the situation of rural women, particularly those displaced by terrorist violence, drug trafficking and other violence;

-- Urged governments to promote legislative initiatives that increase the status of women in agriculture, family enterprises, the professions and the informal sector;

-- Urged States to ensure the protection of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women migrant workers, and to implement measures to eradicate all forms of racism and xenophobia; and

-- Urged that women be included in the Middle East peace process.

(more)

Officers

The Commission's officers are Patricia Licuanan (Philippines), Chairperson; Irene Freudenschuss-Reichl (Austria), Natalia Drozd (Belarus) and Olga Pellicer (Mexico) Vice-Chairpersons; and Selma Ashipala (Namibia), Rapporteur. Gertrude Mongella, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, is the Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Membership

The 45 members of the Commission are: Algeria, Angola, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Ecuador, Finland, France, Greece, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Namibia, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sudan, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Venezuela and Zambia.

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