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PREPARATORY COMMITTEE OF THE WORLD
CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
DECADE FOR WOMEN, 1980

Second session

27 August to 7 September 1979

Item 3 of the provisional agenda. Rules of procedure and other
outstanding questions on the organization of work of the Conference

Statement submitted by the Women's International League for Peace and
Freedom, a non-governmental organization in category II consultative
status, on behalf of the Board of the Conference of Non-Governmental
Organizations in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social
Council

The Secretary-General of the Conference has received the following statement,
which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 29 and 30 of Economic and Social
Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

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The Board of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative
Status with the Economic and Social Council wishes to make the following
comments with regard to the participation of non-governmental organizations in
the 1980 World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women.

Members are extremely concerned at the recommendation, as set out in General
Assembly resolution 33/189, paragraph 7 (g), requesting the Secretary-General
of the Conference to "provide a list of the non-governmental organizations which
may address the Conference, for approval by the Preparatory Committee at its
second session, on the understanding that the number will be limited..."

We regret this departure from the procedures of almost all United Nations
conferences, beginning with the Environment Conference and including the World
Conference on International Women's Year, HABITAT, the United Nations Conference
on Human Settlements, the United Nations Water Conference and the United Nations
Conference on Technical Co-operation Among Developing Countries. In these
Conferences the decision to allow non-governmental organizations to speak was
made on the spot by the Chairman and the delegates of the appropriate bodies.
Non-governmental organizations, through their consultative relationship based on

experience and knowledge in economic, technical and social fields, are able to provide expertise that could enhance the work of the Conference, if they are permitted to make a contribution on agenda items orally, during the meeting, as well as in written statements. At a time when background documentation has still to be prepared, it is extremely difficult for organizations to make decisions as to whether they wish to speak at the Conference. It may be pointed out, moreover, that when non-governmental organizations have made oral interventions at previous conferences, they have generally been scrupulous, speaking to the point and within the time allowed.

The General Assembly has repeatedly called upon non-governmental organizations to bring to the fore their unique expertise, informal professionalism and special knowledge to contribute to the work of the world organization. The Secretary-General has, moreover, on numerous occasions, praised the close collaboration between the non-governmental organizations and the United Nations, a collaboration which has contributed a great deal on a wide range of issues, including women. It is our view that the placing of a pre-determined limit on the number of representatives of non-governmental organizations who may speak at the 1980 Conference would set an unfortunate precedent and be detrimental to further development of the consultative relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations.

Any limit would require the establishment of selective procedures which could give rise to accusations of arbitrariness, and such procedures, in our experience, are not easy to devise. We therefore earnestly hope that observers from non-governmental organizations at the 1980 World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women will be permitted to make oral statements, if they so request, as in previous meetings, subject, of course, to the Chairman's discretion and the availability of them.
