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## Third Committee

### Summary record of the 13th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 17 October 2001, at 3 p.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Al-Hinai ..... (Oman)

## Contents

Agenda item 112: Advancement of women\*

Agenda item 113: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"\*

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\* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.*

**Agenda item 112: Advancement of women** (A/56/3, 38/Rev.1, 174, A/56/222-S/2001/736, A/56/268, 279, 306, 316, 328, 329 and 472)

**Agenda item 113: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”** (A/56/222-S/2001/736, A/56/306, 319 and Add.1)

1. **Ms. King** (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women), drawing attention to gender issues in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September, said that the negative effects of globalization had become all the more apparent in recent days. The international community must ensure that women were not disadvantaged when downturns occurred, and that any benefits of globalization were equitably distributed. Gender mainstreaming and gender-budgeting strategies should be normalized accordingly.

2. The past year had seen a strengthening of gender mainstreaming throughout the United Nations. The high-level segment of the recent session of the Economic and Social Council had stressed the role of women in economic and social development and in peace-making, particularly in Africa, while the Third United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries had identified gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective tools for combating poverty and achieving sustainable development. The twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, for its part, had laid emphasis on an HIV/AIDS-prevention strategy that would challenge prevailing gender stereotypes and inequalities. (Latest figures indicated that in South Africa, 40 per cent of adult deaths in 2000 had been caused by AIDS-related illnesses, and — a matter of particular concern — the death rate of women in their 20s was higher than that of women in their 60s.) The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance recently held at Durban had urged States to integrate a gender perspective into relevant policies and programmes and had recognized that the intersection of racial and gender discrimination served to doubly disadvantage women. The Conference had

also recommended that the Assembly should declare a year or a decade against trafficking in persons, especially women, youth and children. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime was another recent achievement to be welcomed.

3. The forthcoming International Conference on Financing for Development would play a crucial role in promoting the sharing of the benefits of economic growth and social progress and the alleviation of women’s poverty. It would give Member States the opportunity, inter alia, to integrate a gender perspective into the new international financial architecture. The Second World Assembly on Ageing, for its part, would provide an opportunity to consider the impact of changed demographic patterns and the contribution of older women in the community.

4. The Commission on the Status of Women, jointly with the Interagency Taskforce on Women, Peace and Security, had embarked on follow-up to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) (on women and peace and security) and hoped to mobilize an additional \$100,000 to that end. Member States must ensure that women were fully involved in all peace processes and that the issue of gender-based violence against women as a consequence of armed conflict was addressed at all levels. The plight of women in Afghanistan was particularly tragic. In view of the approach of winter, the international community must act decisively to ensure that women and children were not relegated to second place in humanitarian efforts. Indeed, the crisis in Afghanistan served as a powerful warning of the consequences of excluding women from decision-making.

5. Lastly, she drew attention to the Secretary-General’s report on the critical situation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) (A/56/279).

6. **Ms. Gierycz** (Division for the Advancement of Women/United Nations Development Fund for Women), speaking on item 112, introduced the reports of the Secretary-General on the situation of women in rural areas (A/56/268); traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls (A/56/316); violence against women migrant workers (A/56/329); and the status of the Convention on the

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/56/328).

7. Under item 113, she introduced the report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (A/56/38, Part I) and the report of the Secretary-General on follow-up to and progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/56/319 and Add.1).

8. **Ms. Sandler** (United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)), introducing the report on the activities of the Fund (A/56/174), said that the themes of ending violence and securing peace cut across all UNIFEM programmes. She wished to share five lessons UNIFEM had learned from the ways in which women were organizing and building peace. First, women were developing innovative ways of challenging the use of tradition as a rationale for continued violence, for example, by working with religious leaders, families and communities to change attitudes towards female genital mutilation and femicide. Second, women were investing in long-term public-education and awareness campaigns to stimulate broader coalitions for peace and social justice. Third, women, often under-represented or not represented at peace tables, were often able to address entrenched conflicts and build understanding. Fourth, women were demonstrating that the struggle against HIV/AIDS was a struggle against injustice and inequality; they were the rescue teams who cared for the sick and dying when health-care systems collapsed. Fifth, women linked the need for social and economic rights to notions of human security. UNIFEM's long-term efforts in support of women would result in policy dialogue and in sustainable solutions to social fragmentation.

9. In short, women's perspectives were needed to construct a vision of human security, to build a global dialogue on peace and to generate alternatives to war and violence.

10. **Ms. King** (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women), responding to a question put by **Ms. Stevens** (Belgium), said that non-governmental organizations were currently collaborating in efforts to disseminate the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against

Women on the right to petition (General Assembly resolution 54/4, annex); it was to be hoped that the Assembly would approve the earmarking of additional funds for that purpose.

11. Addressing the concern expressed by **Ms. Elisha** (Benin) that women in least developed countries should not bear the brunt of the fall-out from the events of 11 September, she said she could only urge Member States to remain vigilant in that regard.

12. **Ms. Sandler** (United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)), responding to further questions put by the representative of Belgium, said that, based on a memorandum of understanding between UNIFEM, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), work had been initiated on the inclusion of a gender perspective in preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society. UNIFEM also provided support to women's organizations with a view to improving women's access to information and communications technologies and enhancing content in local languages.

13. **Mr. Amorós Núñez** (Cuba) asked what steps were being taken to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and whether its consideration was planned in the General Assembly or the Commission on the Status of Women.

14. **Ms. Samah** (Algeria), referring to document A/56/319/Add.1, paragraph 5, requested more details about the activities planned as a result of the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the time frame for their implementation.

15. **Ms. King** (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women), regarding the status of the study requested in paragraph 16 of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), said that ongoing consultations with the Security Council were taking place. The team of consultants preparing the report would hold a "brainstorming" session with relevant United Nations offices in early December. The task force which had prepared the outline for the report had submitted reports and data to be incorporated, along with original research by the team.

16. **Ms. Newell** (Secretary of the Committee), in reply to the representative of India, said that a drafting

error had occurred in the report of the Commission on Human Rights and that the report of the Secretary-General had been corrected to reflect the fact that the proposal in question had been initiated by Mexico, not by a non-governmental organization.

17. **Ms. Stevens** (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Turkey, said that since its beginnings, the European Union had been committed to safeguarding peace, freedom, development and equality. Those objectives could not be attained unless women played a full and equal part in all areas of life.

18. Women and children accounted for the vast majority of the victims of armed conflict, but women also played an important role in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace-building. In that connection, the European Union welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and armed conflict and encouraged all parties involved in conflicts to enhance the role of women in peace negotiations. It also called on Member States to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which qualified any form of sexual violence as a crime against humanity when committed as part of a systematic attack against any civilian population.

19. Violence against women, including family violence, was a major obstacle to equality. The European Union urged States to implement national plans to combat all forms of violence against women and children and to develop a mainstreaming approach to its policy aspects: prevention, public awareness, victim support and punishment of perpetrators. The Union would be developing indicators for domestic violence to enable it to assess the problem and gain a better understanding of its causes and effects.

20. The European Union believed that social, cultural or religious factors could not be used to excuse the violation of the fundamental rights of women and girls, and that their rights were universal human rights that Governments must guarantee. It was particularly concerned at the growing number of reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the basic international instrument on respect for women's rights. It called on those States which had not yet done so to ratify the

Convention. The entry into force of its Optional Protocol was also welcome.

21. The European Union welcomed the consensus achieved at the recent Durban Conference on racism, in particular on the need for gender mainstreaming in all actions and policies against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Economic independence for women was an effective means of combating poverty and achieving sustainable development, and women must be able to participate in all areas of economic life without discrimination. The European Union therefore welcomed the Ministerial Declaration of the Economic and Social Council, which recognized the need to promote the role of women in economic and social development. The Council had also recognized the contribution of new information technologies to the empowerment of women. Furthermore, at its special session on HIV/AIDS, the General Assembly had heard the call of the Commission on the Status of Women to place the question of gender equality at the heart of all activities related to the epidemic.

22. The European Union also welcomed the achievements within the United Nations system in promoting gender equality. The Millennium Declaration reaffirmed the need to include a gender perspective in United Nations operational activities. The Commission on the Status of Women naturally played a special role in ensuring gender mainstreaming in all areas of its work, along with follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action. The review of the working methods of the Commission was welcome, as it should result in greater effectiveness.

23. The European Union was determined to integrate the dimension of equality and a gender perspective in all its policies, and had undertaken to draw up indicators and a timetable for implementation in respect of one of the themes in the Beijing Platform for Action each year. It was also examining ways to take the dimension of equality into consideration in its Broad Economic Policy Guidelines, with the aim of raising the visibility of gender mainstreaming. During the process of enlarging the Union, increased attention would be paid to gender equality. The Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality provided for follow-up to the support structures for equality in the candidate countries and for granting appropriate resources to women's associations.

24. In conclusion, the European Union believed that implementing the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all its policies was one of the major challenges it faced. Governments must find the political will, structures and financial resources to respect their commitments to gender equality at all levels of society.

25. **Mr. Mamba** (Swaziland), speaking also on behalf of Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe (members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC)), said that SADC welcomed the efforts within the United Nations system to integrate a gender perspective into its programmes. It was significant that the Millennium Declaration called for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate sustainable development.

26. Obviously, much remained to be done to achieve those ideals. Women's access to productive resources must be improved: a major obstacle faced by women entrepreneurs was the limited start-up capital at their disposal, a result of discriminatory laws and policies as well as cultural values. SADC thus supported the call for Governments to design gender-sensitive policies and programmes at both the macro- and micro-economic levels.

27. SADC countries had frequently expressed their commitment to the challenges of poverty and HIV/AIDS. At their recent summit in Malawi, SADC heads of State and Government had noted that most of the 40 per cent of the region's population still living in poverty were women and children. An estimated 10 million people were living with HIV/AIDS, and the number of infected women far exceeded men. The international community must intensify its efforts to implement the outcome of the Beijing Conference and the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS. Failure to do so would be a failure to uphold the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

28. On a positive note, SADC member countries were making progress towards their target of 30-per-cent representation of women in decision-making structures by 2005. While some countries were lagging, SADC

remained committed to that target and had approved a number of enabling mechanisms at summit level.

29. He noted that UNDP had focused on gender-sensitive national policies and legal frameworks, helping to facilitate a policy dialogue among stakeholders to achieve national gender strategies and legal reform for the protection of women's rights. Most SADC member States had adopted explicit gender policies and had some form of national consultative mechanism to improve coordination and monitoring. The inclusion of two SADC members in the pilot project initiated by the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Division for Public Economics and Public Administration to strengthen the capacity of national machinery for women in Africa was to be welcomed.

30. In 1997, SADC had adopted a Declaration on Gender and Development to monitor the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Programme for Action. At the regional conference in Maseru, Lesotho, in December 2000, it had been noted that legal measures had been adopted to counter violence against women and girls. Violence and harmful traditional practices subordinated women and made them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

31. The Secretary-General was to be commended for his report on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/56/268). Rights of control over land were important since they determined access to other resources — something that SADC was promoting to reduce the level of poverty among women. Inequalities between men and women must be resolved with regard to microfinance and employment opportunities; SADC endorsed the recommendations contained in the report regarding further research on the impact of globalization on rural communities from a gender perspective. To that end, it was crucial to maintain the operations of INSTRAW regarding research for the advancement of women.

32. **Mr. Asadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that, during the Beijing Conference and its review, the further empowerment and development of women were at the centre of the collective endeavours of the international community. General Assembly resolution 55/71 and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, along with the

resolutions of the Commission on the Status of Women, provided a comprehensive road map for taking even more vigorous measures to realize the objectives of the Beijing Conference.

33. Serious challenges and obstacles remained. They included the collective effort to promote gender mainstreaming in policies, programmes and decision-making at the national, regional and international levels. Such a perspective needed to be incorporated in the work programmes of the General Assembly's special session on children, the Second World Assembly on Ageing and follow-up activities on racial discrimination. It should be an integral part of the activities initiated and undertaken by the United Nations system. The Group of 77 and China expressed appreciation for the Secretary-General's report on the follow-up to and progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/56/319) and welcomed the cross-sector collaboration initiated in the system as part of the strategy to promote the advancement of women. It was of crucial importance that Governments and regional bodies should pay adequate attention to the integration of gender aspects in their programmes.

34. Poverty eradication was a fundamental building-block in the campaign to realize that long-term vision of the international community. Within that framework, attention should be paid to the situation of women in rural areas, as addressed in the Secretary-General's report (A/56/268), and to the conclusions and recommendations of the expert group meeting on the situation of rural women in the context of globalization, held recently in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

35. The obstacles to advancement that women faced included income inequality between men and women, unemployment and deepening poverty among the most vulnerable groups, as well as situations arising from external factors such as the debt burden, a low level of official development assistance, coercive measures in contravention of international law, armed conflict, foreign occupation and terrorism. Fundamental to their advancement and to the further progress of societies at large were their engagement in decision-making and their empowerment in political and economic life. There was a need for a cultural, social, economic, political and structural environment, supported by a legal framework, where women's potential and abilities could develop. Awareness-raising, education and training, combating of stereotypes and the promotion

and protection of women's rights and dignity were among the essential policies to be pursued by all societies.

36. The aim of those who committed violence against women — which was not only an affront to their rights and dignity but an extremely widespread problem, expressed in harmful traditional practices and in commercial exploitation — was their subordination. The Group of 77 and China was ready to cooperate with the United Nations to strengthen the ongoing campaign to eliminate that violence.

37. Responsibility for the implementation of internationally established goals to promote women's empowerment rested primarily with Governments, which should maintain an enabling environment where women at the grass-roots level and other actors in civil society could participate in such programmes. International cooperation was needed, however, for the realization of gender equality. The support of regional and national efforts and sharing of expertise on gender issues were of critical importance for achieving the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action, as were data collection and the development of gender-related analysis and statistics on advancement of women, and the mobilization of adequate financial and human resources.

38. Substantive improvement in the status of women ultimately depended on the determination of the community at large. Conflict resolution, establishment of peace and achievement of long-term sustainable development were requisite conditions. A spirit of cooperation and solidarity were needed to rise to the collective challenge.

39. **Mr. Valdes** (Chile), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Rio Group, said that the education and training of women, the achievement of their right to enjoy physical and mental health and their equal participation in employment must be the basis of future work. In the Santiago Declaration (August 2001), the Rio Group had recognized the importance of the ongoing task of gender mainstreaming in its policies, in strategic programmes for economic and social development and in the strengthening of democracy. The past decade had seen a large-scale inflow of women into the labour market, greater access to education, increased participation in decision-making and better coverage in reproductive-health services. Advances had been made in legislation, the

formulation of national equality plans and the creation of government mechanisms for the benefit of women, as well as in the strengthening of gender justice.

40. A major obstacle to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. The members of the Rio Group considered that it had become an urgent matter of foreign policy with economic and development implications threatening decades of progress in human rights. Other challenges included achieving more equitable economic development, reducing the gaps in the educational system, improving deficient health systems and providing services to broad sectors of the population. Another cross-cutting problem was the double discrimination of women both on account of gender and origin or poverty. In the region, indigenous women tended to live in greater poverty and were thus prevented from exercising their rights to the full.

41. In view of the need to overcome those ancestral problems of discrimination and to combat its new forms, which affected migrants in the region in particular, the Rio Group fully recognized all the rights of indigenous peoples and reiterated the need to review migration policies to eliminate all instances of discrimination. Its members had pledged to mainstream the gender perspective in all programmes of action against racism so as to ensure the access of women of disadvantaged groups to productive resources on an equal footing with men, thus promoting their participation in the economic and production development of their communities.

42. **Mr. Zhang** Lei (China) said that women, especially in the developing world, had seen their rights seriously compromised in terms of political participation, employment, education and health; their rights were further undermined by the existence of stereotypes in many societies and by HIV/AIDS. Women were often the victims of terrorism and conflict; countries should abide by the Charter, and international cooperation should allow the United Nations and the Security Council to play a maximum role in eliminating terrorism and conflict and allowing the cause of women to progress. Since the conditions of women in economic development, geographical location and culture were very different, however, all countries should learn from each other in the common task of advancing the cause of women and enhancing their status.

43. With the world economy dominated by increasing globalization, it was for the international community to recognize the importance of poverty eradication by taking effective measures to honour its commitments in order to help women out of their predicament and provide a material basis for their development.

44. His Government favoured improving the working methods of the Commission on the Status of Women, and all proposals and measures for that purpose should be studied. In implementing the Beijing Platform for Action it had officially enacted the Programme of Development of Chinese Women, 2001-2010, to promote the political participation of women, to achieve their full employment, to eliminate poverty and to improve their health.

45. **Ms. Khvan** (Russian Federation) said that recent meetings of United Nations bodies had provided valuable tools for national policy formulation on the advancement of women. She was concerned, however, that the issue of violence against women should not be allowed to eclipse other important issues on the agenda of the Commission on the Status of Women. Ways of improving that body's effectiveness should be discussed.

46. Her Government had implemented new legislative and other measures to improve the welfare of women and girls. Committed to strengthening international cooperation to combat trafficking in persons, it had signed the relevant protocol to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. It had also signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. A meeting had, moreover, been held at the ministerial level on the prevention of the sexual exploitation of women and children, with a view to revising legislation to prevent misuse of information and communications technologies for the purposes of trafficking in persons and to strengthen controls on tourist enterprises and agencies arranging employment or marriages overseas.

47. The national plan of action to improve the status of women (2001-2005) included measures to improve the status of women in the labour market, to protect women's health, to develop the social security system for women and to provide assistance to women victims of violence.

48. It was the view of her delegation that United Nations activities to combat discrimination and

violence against women should now focus exclusively on crisis situations. In that regard, the Taliban regime was a symbol of the grossest violation of women's dignity; as such, it had received universal condemnation at the recent session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The regime was clearly not, however, intent only on terrorizing Afghan women; it was also intent on attacking the international community. The United Nations must thus take action to safeguard the dignity and human rights of women against the threat of terrorism.

49. **Ms. Fleming** (World Bank), referring to the "hidden heroism" of women everywhere, said that, in working towards the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action, the World Bank was committed to making gender equality central in the fight against poverty. Gender inequalities hampered development, economic growth and poverty reduction; giving women and men equal voices and access to resources were important development objectives in their own right.

50. Many of the hard-won gains in gender equality of the past few decades remained fragile. As the world became increasingly global, events in one corner of the world affected individuals worldwide. Thus, the World Bank estimated that the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 would hurt growth in developing countries worldwide, condemning perhaps 10 million more people to live in poverty in the next year; the most vulnerable people in developing countries would be hit hardest, and an estimated additional 20,000 to 40,000 children under five could die. The worst situation would be in Africa. The economic downturn associated with the attacks would be particularly devastating for women in developing countries: despite progress, they were still more likely to be undernourished and underpaid than men.

51. Among its initiatives to advance gender equality, the World Bank had loaned some \$5.3 billion for girls' education since 1995, and each year committed an average of \$1.3 billion in new lending for health projects in the developing world. Its research on gender and development had revealed that development policies did not take gender relations into account; the Bank's Board had therefore recently endorsed a new gender-mainstreaming strategy.

52. The Millennium development goals provided a road map. The United Nations and the World Bank must work in a complementary manner, enhancing

coherence and giving priority to those they intended to help.

*The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.*