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Improvement of the status of women in the SecretariatReport of the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. At a time when the United Nations faces an expanding role in world affairs, it becomes increasingly important that both women and men participate actively and visibly at all levels in the work of the Organization, under conditions of full equality, in accordance with article 8 of the Charter of the United Nations. Such participation is not merely a matter of equity, it is also of significance in order to reflect and emphasize the Organization's advocacy of the full integration of women into the political, economic and social life of nations.

2. On 18 December 1985, the General Assembly, by resolution 40/258 B, approved a detailed action programme (A/C.5/40/30) designed to address the obstacles to the improvement of the status of women in the United Nations Secretariat. Two progress reports of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/41/18 and A/C.5/42/24) describe the resulting measures taken or envisaged. The latter report presented a comprehensive summary of the developments that led to the adoption of the action programme and outlined its main features; it also contained a very specific, item-by-item evaluation of the action programme's implementation during its first two years.

3. The present report concentrates on developments that took place during the past year.

I. CURRENT SITUATION

A. Women in posts subject to geographical distribution

4. Despite financial constraints and the retrenchment programme mandated by the General Assembly that prevailed during the past year, some progress was made. As at 30 June 1988, the percentage of women in posts subject to geographical distribution stood at 26.3, compared with 23.1 per cent at 30 June 1985, when the action programme started, and 25.7 per cent at 30 June 1987.

5. The upward trend in the representation of women at the senior and decision-making levels noted in previous reports continued during the past year. Table 1 below illustrates the changes that took place over the period 30 June 1987 to 30 June 1988.

Table 1
Number and percentage of women in posts
subject to geographical distribution
(At 30 June 1987 and 30 June 1988) a/

	<u>30/6/87</u>		<u>30/6/88</u>	
	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
USG	2	7.7	2	7.7
ASG	2	9.1	1	5.3
D-2	2	2.4	5	5.7
D-1	24	10.5	19	8.6
P-5	54	11.4	59	12.4
P-4	149	22.2	162	23.3
P-3	238	34.9	251	39.0
P-2	165	45.2	137	43.2
P-1	30	71.4	27	73.0
	666	25.7	663	26.3

a/ See A/42/636, table G, and A/43/659, annex I, table F.

B. Career development opportunities for women

With the introduction of the vacancy management and staff redeployment programme, career opportunities have broadened considerably for all staff. Notices of vacant posts are routinely circulated at all duty stations. The special guidelines for the consideration of seniority that were introduced for the promotion process are now also being applied to vacancy management. This should have a positive effect on the career development of women.

C. Distribution of women by region of origin

7. With respect to region of origin, the distribution of women in geographical posts remains uneven, as table 2 indicates. While in five out of the seven groups the percentage of women rose slightly, efforts will have to be made to appoint more women from the Eastern European region, as well as from Africa and the Middle East.

Table 2

Professional staff in posts subject to geographical
distribution, by region and gender

(At 30 June 1987 and 30 June 1988) a/

Region	No. of staff		No. of women		Women as a percentage of total staff from the region	
	1987	1988	1987	1988	1987	1988
Africa	428	424	49	51	11.4	12.0
Asia and the Pacific	426	420	132	132	31.0	31.4
Europe (Eastern)	261	249	14	14	5.4	5.6
Europe (Western)	583	568	168	14	28.8	30.6
Latin America	202	189	59	57	29.2	30.2
Middle East	125	122	22	21	17.6	17.2
North America and the Caribbean	542	524	214	206	39.5	39.3

a/ See A/42/536, table G, and A/43/659, annex II, table 3.

D. Rate of recruitment

8. During the past year, the rate of recruitment of women against posts subject to geographical distribution once again exceeded the level of the previous year: that is, 19 out of 66, or 28.8 per cent, of the newly appointed staff were women, compared with 28.5 per cent during the previous reporting period. Out of the 19 women appointed, 14 came in at the P-2 level, 3 at the P-3 level, 1 at the P-4 level and 1 at the P-5 level (see A/43/659, annex I, table G, and A/43/659, annex II, table 6).

E. Distribution across departments

9. The 1988 report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat provides detailed statistical data on the distribution of women at each level by office or department (A/43/659, annex II, table 12). It is apparent from these statistics that the distribution of women across various organizational units of the United Nations remains uneven: while women are well represented in most departments and offices at the major headquarters duty stations, particularly in the areas of administration and conference services, they remain severely underrepresented (16 per cent or less) in most of the regional commissions and in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), as can be seen from table 3 below.

Table 3

Number and percentage of women in posts subject
to geographical distribution in the regional
commissions and UNCTAD a/

	30/6/87		30/6/88	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
ECA	15	9.0	19	11.5
ECE	9	9.0	9	9.0
ECLAC	21	16.0	20	16.4
ESCWA	11	17.2	10	14.9
ESCAP	33	22.3	31	22.5
UNCTAD	37	15.3	32	13.9

a/ See A/42/636, table G, and A/43/659, annex II, table 12.

II. PROGRESS MADE DURING THE THIRD YEAR OF THE ACTION PROGRAMME

A. Institutional arrangements

10. A review of the institutional arrangements for the continuation of the action programme was conducted as called for by the General Assembly in its resolution 42/220 C of 21 December 1987. This review took into account the fact that the office of the Co-ordinator for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat of the United Nations had been established in the context of a plan consisting of two phases (A/C.5/40/30, para. 29). During the first phase, the Co-ordinator identified obstacles that impeded the advancement of women in the Organization, and submitted concrete policy recommendations, including timetables and proposals, for procedural changes. During the second phase, the emphasis shifted to the monitoring of operational activities and the integration of new approaches and measures into the day-to-day workings of the Organization. This phase was initially scheduled to end on 30 June 1987, but was extended until 30 June 1988, in accordance with resolution 42/220 C.

11. At this stage, the Office of Human Resources Management is responsible for implementing the action programme, including the special measures approved by the Secretary-General, whereas the Steering Committee for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat, a high-level advisory group of senior women and men appointed by the Secretary-General, monitors the progress made and provides guidance through regular reports to the Secretary-General. Moreover, a focal point has been established within the immediate office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management to ensure co-ordination of the action plan's implementation and to provide secretariat services to the Steering Committee. This

arrangement is intended to meet the concerns expressed by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 1988/124 of 27 May 1988, since it provides for continuity of the action programme within the existing organizational structure.

B. Implementation

1. Action taken on the measures approved upon recommendation of the Steering Committee

12. During the first months of 1988, the Steering Committee conducted an extensive review of the action programme, applying the monitoring model which it had developed and presented in its third report (see A/C.5/42/24, annex IV). On the basis of that review, the Steering Committee concluded that progress in implementing the measures approved by the Secretary-General on the basis of its recommendations had been uneven.

13. Specifically, the Steering Committee reiterated its recommendations that the limited opportunity for high-level appointments possible under the current constraints should be fully used to increase the presence of women at decision-making levels, and that vigorous attempts should be made to reach the goal of 30 per cent women in posts subject to geographical distribution by 1990, now that controlled recruitment was being gradually resumed.

14. At the same time, the Steering Committee noted that some improvement had occurred, and concluded that the process initiated by the action programme was an achievement in itself; its impact would be felt increasingly as implementation continued. Moreover, a number of major achievements of the action programme were identified by the Steering Committee in its monitoring report:

(a) The percentage of women in posts subject to geographical distribution had risen from 22.9 per cent in March 1985 to 26.2 per cent at 31 March 1988;

(b) Since March 1985, several women had been appointed to high-level posts, including three to the post of Under-Secretary-General;

(c) Nine women who had served on a succession of short-term contracts had been subsequently recruited, after a special review;

(d) The guidelines on cumulative seniority had contributed to the women's rate of advancement in the Professional category;

(e) In recruiting at entry levels for Professional staff, the percentage of women had risen, particularly through increased publicity on the principle of equality in Member States participating in national examinations;

(f) An effort was being made to redress inconsistencies in the classification standards for the secretarial occupation;

(g) Supervisory training had been strengthened and inter-agency co-operation in that area had been initiated;

(h) Inequities adversely affecting former General Service staff from other duty stations had been removed from the recruitment standards for that category for New York;

(i) Conditions for maternity leave had been improved;

(j) Inter-agency consultations had started on improved arrangements for child-care and adoption leave;

(k) The structure of the appeals process had been strengthened;

(l) Training modules had been prepared that addressed sexual harassment and gender discrimination.

15. The Steering Committee's recommendations as set out in its fourth report, dated 30 June 1988, are to be found in annex I to the present report. The Secretary-General has accepted these recommendations, and the implementation of the action programme will be pursued to the extent possible taking into account the current constraints on recruitment.

2. Action taken on the 1988-1989 work programme

16. The report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its forty-second session (A/C.5/42/24) contained a work programme for the biennium 1988-1989, based on the Steering Committee's recommendations, which the General Assembly subsequently endorsed in its resolution 42/220 C. Several elements of the programme are already being implemented, but others have to await the availability of resources or the development of more comprehensive data systems. Particular problems occurred in the efforts to establish a career development system for the General Service staff in New York. Benchmark job descriptions are now being prepared which will make it possible to design realistic career paths for each occupation and to identify possible crossover points into other occupations. In addition, progress was hampered in establishing focal points at duty stations away from Headquarters to follow up on issues related to General Service career development. These issues will have priority in the coming year. A status report on the implementation of the work programme can be found in annex II to the present report.

C. Work programme and resource requirements

17. In order to co-ordinate all activities related to the status of women and to provide secretariat services to the Steering Committee, two staff members will be required, one at the D-1 level and one in the General Service category, for the duration of the 1988-1989 biennium; they will be deployed within existing resources to the office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management.

Annex I

PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED BY THE STEERING COMMITTEE
FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN
THE SECRETARIAT IN ITS FOURTH REPORT, JUNE 1988

- (a) The recruitment, assignment and promotion of women at senior levels;
- (b) The establishment of a career development system for the General Service and related categories in New York as well as in other duty stations, based on job analysis;
- (c) The development of an inventory of posts and staff, including the General Service and related categories, by occupation, level and duty station, as a first step towards integrated human resources planning, in order to ensure the best possible use of staff resources and to allow staff to identify the best remaining career opportunities;
- (d) The development of a new timetable and work plan for the implementation of those measures that were already approved but that have not been implemented or have only been partially implemented;
- (e) The establishment of a formal monitoring process within the Office of Human Resources Management, in close co-operation with each office and department, in order to ensure that women will not be disproportionately affected by the retrenchment exercise; this should be followed by the establishment of a goal-setting system within each department, in close consultation with the Office of Human Resources Management and the appointment and promotion bodies, to provide a basis for monitoring and analysis;
- (f) The strengthening of training programmes and human resources planning systems in the Organization.

Annex II

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF THE 1988-1989 WCRK PROGRAMME a/

(a) Implementation of outstanding recommendations contained in the Steering Committee's reports, as approved by the Secretary-General:

- (i) Introduce and take action on the results of the comprehensive monitoring system;

Status: The Office of Human Resources Management conducted a monitoring exercise, in close co-operation with the Co-ordinator, which was subsequently reviewed by the Steering Committee and incorporated into its fourth report.

- (ii) Utilize the vacancy management system to further the career development of women in all categories;

Status: Special guidelines for the consideration of seniority were introduced into the selection criteria of the vacancy management system to ensure that women would have every opportunity to compete on an equal footing.

- (iii) Develop a staff rotation policy to ensure the effective use of human resources while eliminating perceived disincentives to mobility, particularly in the area of family life;

Status: Special measures to facilitate mobility were approved by the Secretary-General on the basis of recommendations submitted by the staff-management consultative machinery; consideration is being given to the requirements of families.

- (iv) Complete the development of a data base on skills inventories and career paths for women;

Status: This will be completed as soon as a more comprehensive data system for human resources management has been introduced in the context of the ongoing modernization programme.

- (v) Further improve the job design of posts in the secretarial occupations;

Status: Benchmark job descriptions for the secretarial occupation, together with benchmarks for other occupations in the General Service, will be presented to the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) for approval at its first session in 1989.

- (vi) Develop occupational training programmes for General Service staff based on career path analysis;

Status: Additional training programmes have been introduced in the areas of electronic data processing and word processing. Moreover, effective drafting

courses are being organized for specific occupational groups in accordance with departmental requirements.

- (vii) Integrate the career development system for General Service staff with the examination and selection process for advancement to the Professional category;

Status: This will be started once career paths have been developed on the basis of benchmark job descriptions as set out under subparagraph (v).

- (viii) Establish a system for part-time posts and flexible working hours within the context of the restructuring and post-reduction process;

Status: Scheduled for 1989.

- (ix) Introduce further measures aimed at avoiding gender discrimination and sexual harassment, both in the context of staff training and of the new framework for the administration of justice;

Status: Scheduled for 1989.

- (x) Follow-up on the inter-agency negotiations related to improving conditions of service for women throughout the common system;

Status: The Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (Personnel and General Administrative Questions) (CCAQ (PER)) has adopted improved measures for reporting on the career progression of women, in close consultation with the ICSC secretariat. CCAQ (PER) has also placed on its work programme a number of items that affect the status of women on the organizations, such as adoption leave, child-care facilities and spouse employment. A personnel directive on adoption leave is being issued.

- (b) Monitoring the impact of the restructuring and retrenchment on women at all duty stations and in all staff categories:

- (i) Ensure that the status of women is considered in the formulation of reduction-in-force policies and procedures for the forthcoming biennium;
- (ii) Monitor the implementation of these policies and procedures to ensure that women are not affected disproportionately;

Status: Special criteria and appropriate monitoring mechanisms have been introduced into the vacancy management process for this purpose.

- (c) Improving career prospects of women at offices away from Headquarters:

- (i) Establish focal points at the various duty stations to follow up on issues related to General Service career development;

Status: Scheduled for 1989.

- (ii) Evaluate data on the gender distribution of General Service staff by occupation and determine measures necessary to avoid any differences in career prospects;

Status: This will be done once the new job classification standards for General Service staff at offices away from Headquarters have been introduced in accordance with the timetable established by ICSC.

Notes

a/ A/C.5/42/24, para. 31.
