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Chairman: Mrs. MAIR (Jamaica)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.55 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 85: UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN: EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE: REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/32/3, chap. VI, sect. B, A/32/174, A/32/175, A/32/211, A/32/216 and A/32/218)

1. Mr. BAROODY (Saudi Arabia) stated that he would support every United Nations activity aimed at promoting women's rights, particularly in connexion with such matters as motherhood and birth control. Although he was a representative of the old world, he was not opposed to innovation, provided it was creative and not deleterious to society at large.
2. Many Western countries had only recently taken action to help women realize their aspirations in certain important areas. In numerous European countries, for example, women had not been permitted to dispose of their own property until recently; in some they still did not have the right to vote. In the Arab world, on the other hand, women had always had the right to dispose of their own property, a right with which even a husband could not interfere. The Arab world had its own way of life and did not need to ape that of the West or of the Socialist world. In many Western countries democracy had been compromised by the practice of buying favours from politicians. In Asia leadership emanated from old tribal custom in accordance with which the leader was a servant of the people; otherwise he was a tyrant.
3. The break-up of families in the West was not the fault of individuals but resulted from industrial and technological revolutions which had raised the standard of living to include many material luxuries that were not essential. That did not, however, lead to happiness, on the contrary, people anxiously vied with each other to achieve material status. Yet the basic needs of humanity were still food, shelter and clothing, as they had been since people lived in caves. Nowadays women wished to work, either in order to supplement their husbands' incomes or to earn pin money. Clearly single women must work because otherwise they would have nothing to do. Women with children had the responsibility of bringing up their families but would have the right to work when the children had grown up.
4. The United Nations was trying to improve the situation of mothers, particularly in respect of education. While he was not opposed to such activities, he did not favour women and men pushing each other to change the fabric of society. In emphasizing the rights pertaining to women and men respectively, it was important to avoid hasty action that might imperil the family unit which had evolved over millions of years. Women should move slowly in adapting themselves to the new demands of the industrial and technological revolutions. The cheapening of women through pornography should be eliminated. Women must be respected as partners in families that would prepare the next generation to be better than the present one.

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5. Mrs. EISTRUP (Jamaica) expressed the hope that the thirty-second session of the General Assembly would be characterized by truly significant progress in advancing the status of women. The world clearly had a very long way to go in according half of the human family that position of equality and dignity to which it was entitled. There were still pockets of deeply entrenched prejudice against women, who continued to be potential and actual victims of the inhibitions and insecurities of societies and of individuals, so that they were denied the right to be responsible and creative persons in all areas of national life. As long as such attitudes persisted, the work of the United Nations Decade for Women could not be said to have begun.

6. It was therefore the responsibility of the Third Committee to take positive action towards liberating the institutions, the laws and above all the minds of men and women so that they could accept the basic principle of the equality of all human beings, a principle which inspired the work of the United Nations in every area. Fundamental to that purpose was the acceptance by the international community of a legally binding instrument which would unequivocally establish the equal status of women and men, and would outlaw all forms of discrimination, both implicit and explicit.

7. Her delegation would reserve detailed comment on the draft Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women until the proposed working group had met but in the meantime would emphasize that the strongest evidence of the true commitment of the United Nations to the goals of the Decade would be the demonstration of its willingness to overcome all the obstacles lying in the way of the adoption of that fundamental instrument.

8. Other ways in which the Committee could demonstrate its commitment to those goals included the work of the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women. Her delegation would serve as a member of the Consultative Committee on the Fund, on behalf of the Latin American group, and would reserve the right to speak further on the question following the Consultative Committee's third meeting. A pledging conference for the Fund to be held on 8 November 1977 would provide an occasion for the strong reaffirmation by the international community of its dedication to the goals of the Decade. The proposed international Training and Research Institute for the Advancement of Women would also receive support at the pledging conference. Such an Institute would have the potential for setting guidelines for the direction and content of research and training relevant to the urgent needs of women's development, particularly in the developing countries. The skills of women in data collection and analysis as well as in project preparation and execution must be upgraded and a central international clearing-house for such expertise could provide an invaluable means of maximizing national and regional resources. The Institute could also perform an important service in the area of research on the status of women. The direction and emphasis of such research was a critical issue. There was a need to identify and mobilize potential and existing skills in developing countries through national and regional institutions. The Institute could also ensure against the danger that women's studies might merely become one more prestigious device enabling those scholars with easy access to research funding sources to reap quick academic rewards.

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9. Mrs. CASTRO de BARISH (Costa Rica) recalled that the Assistant Secretary-General for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs in her introductory statement at the 2nd meeting had quoted paragraph 16 of the Declaration of Mexico, to the effect that the ultimate end of development was to achieve a better quality of life for all, which included the physical, moral, intellectual and cultural growth of the human person. In doing so she had set the real goal to be pursued in efforts to advance the objectives of the Decade for Women. In societies where women did not yet participate actively in efforts to promote social and economic progress, only partial progress had been achieved, since half the population had remained in a backward state. The Decade offered favourable prospects for achieving the objectives of the World Plan of Action, provided its impact was felt in the societies of all countries.

10. With regard to institutional and legislative aspects, much had been achieved, especially at the international level. The efforts made had culminated in the elaboration of the draft Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. She supported that instrument in principle and hoped that it would shortly be adopted. She considered, however, that it would be improved by the incorporation of suggestions such as that made by UNESCO for the inclusion of an additional article on cultural rights. In addition it was necessary to clarify concepts so that the provisions of the Convention would not conflict with existing legal instruments, as ILO had pointed out in its important memorandum concerning article 16, paragraph 2. The Convention would also benefit from the very useful observations by delegations incorporated in document A/32/218.

11. She also noted that progress at the international level was not matched by progress at the national level, where the efforts required were much more complex, in view of the deeply rooted prejudices that characterized all societies. Those prejudices would be eradicated only when Governments and local authorities demonstrated the requisite political will and made a concerted effort to put into practice the recommendations and instruments adopted by the United Nations. It was true that progress had been achieved in the integration of women and in their participation in national efforts, such progress being a function of the level of education and social and economic development in each country. The achievements were largely cosmetic, however, and had no real impact.

12. Another important matter was the dissemination of information on the rights already guaranteed by Governments. That activity was not carried on as regularly and persistently as it should be, one of the principal reasons being a lack of conviction in both governmental circles and the private sector, especially among rural communities. There was no room for complacency: efforts must be redoubled for the full attainment of the objectives of the Decade.

13. An important aspect of United Nations action was the study and assessment of women's participation in national development and in efforts to achieve peace, protect the environment and promote human rights. The Voluntary Fund for the

(Mrs. Castro de Barish, Costa Rica)

United Nations Decade for Women had been established to that end, and her delegation supported the decisions adopted by the Consultative Committee at its first session. She hoped that the level of voluntary contributions would enable the Fund to discharge the important tasks assigned to it.

14. In conclusion she announced that, in order to mark in 1978 the twenty-fifth anniversary of the attainment by Costa Rican women of their political rights, a special committee had been established by the Legislative Assembly with powers to request funds and private contributions as well as assistance from national bodies. Extensive preparations were being made to celebrate and publicize that event. Local committees had been formed so that the celebration would have a country-wide impact with a view to implementing the recommendations for the Decade.

15. Mr. SAMHAN (United Arab Emirates) said that the Mexico Conference had marked the beginning of a new era in the struggle for women's rights and the participation of women in the shaping of society. His country would spare no effort to assist in implementing the World Plan of Action adopted at that Conference. The progress of society depended on the complete integration of women on an equal footing with men. Both the International Women's Year and the Mexico Conference were clear signs of growing concern for, and a better understanding of, the problems relating to women, which were closely related to the problems of society as a whole.

16. In his delegation's view the World Plan of Action should be implemented within a framework of international and national co-operation. Each country should establish priorities for the conduct of information and research activities. His country supported the establishment of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, which would mark an important stage in the process of enhancing the participation of women in society. At the forthcoming pledging conference his delegation would announce its contribution to the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women. It considered that the Institute should concentrate on ways and means of implementing the objectives of the World Plan of Action and the Programme for the Decade. In that process the diversity of traditions in each society should be taken into account. He also noted that there was a clear link between the status of women and the establishment of a new international economic order, since the inequitable economic relations which impeded progress in the developing countries affected women as much as men.

17. Since the United Arab Emirates had attained its independence, various bodies functioning under the auspices of the President had done their utmost to improve the living conditions of all members of society. When his country had been under foreign domination, the role of women had been confined to the home; after its accession to independence, however, they had regained their normal role in society. The wife of the President, in the vanguard of the women's movement, was president of the first association in the country for the advancement of women,

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(Mr. Samhan, United Arab Emirates)

established in 1972. Numerous women's associations had been established since then. Many seminars had been held to promote the training and education of women, including seminars held in co-operation with the League of Arab States and with UNICEF. The President had emphasized the importance of women's role in society and of the need for educational facilities to promote their advancement. The Ministries of Education, Health and Social Affairs had fostered the provision of education and training facilities for women. Women were participating increasingly in society: they were active in education, training and research, and were becoming nurses and administrative officials, occupying an equal place with men and receiving equal pay for equal work.

18. The women's associations in his country sought to promote the equality of women at the spiritual, cultural and social levels and their effective participation in society; the participation of women in conferences and seminars at all levels; studies on the status of women and the intensification of activities through voluntary campaigns; and the holding of seminars and meetings on the problems of women and addresses on that subject by prominent women.

19. Mrs. MBOKA (Central African Empire) said that International Women's Year represented the culmination of 30 years of effort by the international community to promote women's rights. She praised the threefold objectives of the Year, and noted that the equality of all human beings was a fundamental principle of the Charter.

20. Her Government had always sought to prevent any form of discrimination based on sex or race. Women in the Central African Empire were well protected in the legal and occupational fields. Under labour legislation, recruitment in both the public and the private sector was based solely on qualifications and competence, while equal pay for equal work had always applied. Women had acceded to many high positions in Government, and played an increasing role in political, economic and social life, a role to which His Majesty Emperor Bokassa I attached great importance.

21. Her Government was convinced that the development of the country required the participation of all members of society. Accordingly, agents trained in rural development problems were assigned to rural areas in an effort to raise living standards. Mobilization of the rural population depended to a large extent, however, on the assistance received from various international agencies, which her Government greatly valued.

22. Her delegation hoped that a transformation in the status of women would be brought about by the establishment of the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women, priority being given to programmes for the least developed countries; the early establishment of the International Research and Training Institute; and the implementation of national and regional plans to supplement the World Plan of Action.

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(Mrs. Mboka, Central African Empire)

23. She noted that the situation of women resembled that of peoples under colonial domination, and emphasized that the continued existence of colonialism - one of the greatest evils in society - was a disgrace to humankind.

24. The National Union of Central African Women fully supported the course followed by the Government at both the national and the international level, and praised the many sacrifices made, especially by women, in the struggle for peace and freedom in the countries under colonial domination. In its response in document A/32/211 to paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 3519 (XXX), concerning women's participation in the strengthening of international peace and security and in the struggle against racism and foreign domination, her Government had reaffirmed its support for the United Nations Charter and the charter of OAU and had endorsed the principle of self-determination. In accordance with that principle the National Union of Central African Women, in its unswerving support for the peoples of Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa and Palestine, would establish a dialogue with all women's associations. It would lend its whole-hearted support to the liberation struggle of oppressed peoples against racial discrimination and foreign domination and would subscribe to any action aimed at promoting and strengthening international peace and security.

25. Mr. CARTAS (Romania) welcomed the increasing importance attached to the item before the Committee. In its statements before various international bodies and in its replies to the Secretary-General concerning the implementation of the World Plan of Action, Romania had extensively outlined the action undertaken by it to translate into fact the relevant United Nations resolutions. In that connexion his country had recently transmitted to the Secretary-General two more replies, concerning women's contribution to the consolidation of international peace and security and the juridical implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

26. He wished to stress the practical importance of the measures for the advancement of women adopted at the highest level by his country in 1973. A comprehensive programme, now being implemented, embodied measures to ensure that women received better guidance and training, were able to obtain suitable employment and had a greater share in decision-making. Their participation in enterprises and institutions was expected to increase from 33 per cent in 1973 to 40 per cent by 1980. Under the programme, women could be granted priority in no less than 700 different occupations. The implementation of the programme was closely followed and periodically analysed at the highest political level. The President of the Republic, Nicolae Ceaușescu, speaking on the occasion of one such analysis, had recently stressed the need for increased participation of women in guiding the political, economic and social life of the country. Instructions had been given with a view to expanding their role and speeding up their promotion to employment in which they would have greater responsibility. Resolute action had been considered necessary in order to give women the place in society that they deserved both as a right and as a duty.

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(Mr. Cartas, Romania)

27. In close connexion with their participation in Romania's national development programme, women were actively involved in promoting international peace, security and mutual understanding. The National Women's Council of Romania had close relations with national women's organizations and prominent women in 95 countries on all continents. It also had relations with many regional and international women's organizations.

28. Like the Romanian people as a whole, Romanian women firmly supported the establishment of a new world order, the democratization of international relations, the elimination of underdevelopment and the speedier economic and social advance of less developed countries, which was an essential requirement for the progress of mankind. They stood for the implementation of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. They were following with interest the proceedings of the Belgrade Conference and wished to see a climate of confidence, co-operation and détente firmly established in Europe. They would welcome effective steps towards disarmament and military disengagement, without which European security and lasting peace were hardly conceivable.

29. In his delegation's view the draft Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women marked a significant step forward in the advancement of women. His delegation would deal extensively with that question when the articles of the draft Convention were examined by the ad hoc working group to be set up for that purpose. Emphasizing women's participation in the strengthening of international peace and security, he warmly supported the initiative of the German Democratic Republic in that field, which it considered a noteworthy contribution to the efforts of the progressive forces to bring about a new international order based on the fundamental principles of international law. The involvement of women in the consolidation of international peace and security was part and parcel of the general endeavour to build a better and fairer world.

30. Mrs. GUEYE (Senegal) said that the proclamation of International Women's Year and the United Nations Decade for Women expressed the will of the international community to correct long-standing injustices, and her delegation was especially pleased, therefore, that the Committee had decided to give priority to the item under discussion. It was important, however, for the status of women to be considered not only in its social and humanitarian aspects but also within the broader context of development and of the importance of women's participation in the maintenance of peace and the promotion of friendly relations between peoples. Her delegation therefore regretted that the report of the Committee on Review and Appraisal had made no mention of the implementation of the World Plan of Action, even though it had had before it Economic and Social Council resolution 2060 (LXII), the report of the Commission on the Status of Women and the report of the Committee for Development Planning. Furthermore, since progress in the implementation of the World Plan of Action had to be considered within the framework of the International Development Strategy, the question should be examined jointly with the Second Committee so as to obtain a clearer picture of the extent to which women were being integrated into development in accordance with the Plan and with the Declaration of Mexico.

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(Mrs. Gueye, Senegal)

31. In connexion with the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/32/174, she wished to announce that her Government would supply the figures missing from table 2 as soon as possible. She also expressed the hope that the pledging conference to be held on 8 November 1977 would see a substantial increase in contributions.

32. Her delegation also welcomed the draft Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women aimed at ensuring women's political, civil, social and economic equality with men on a world-wide scale. The objective was not to favour those who were already privileged but primarily to help the vast majority of women, the hundreds of millions throughout the world who were deprived of basic rights and fundamental freedoms, especially those in developing countries and countries under foreign domination and those who lived in rural areas. It was necessary to eliminate inequalities as rapidly as possible by bridging the gap between the developed countries and the countries of the third world and by implementing the new international economic order; by putting an end to colonial and foreign domination, aggression, racism in all its forms - including zionism and apartheid - and the exploitation of man by man; and by establishing peace and security throughout the world. The draft Convention before the Committee (A/32/218) tried to take different circumstances into account in so far as possible and called upon countries to be realistic and transcend their national egoisms in order to produce a precise but flexible document which could be adapted to the realities of any society, whatever its stage of development. In adopting it, the United Nations would be taking an important step in defence of the ideals which underlay its very existence.

33. Mrs. MITSKEVICH (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that the United Nations Decade for Women was an important step towards achieving social and economic progress and the strengthening of world peace and that the international women's movement was becoming an increasingly important factor in that connexion.

34. Her delegation had carefully studied the Secretary-General's report in document A/32/211 and was pleased to note that many replies from Governments and non-governmental organizations stressed the urgent need to continue the struggle against all forms of colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, fascism, racism and apartheid and mass violations of human rights and that most replies called for an end to the armaments race and the production and testing of all forms of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, and for general and complete disarmament and the convening of a World Disarmament Conference as soon as possible. Her own country's reply indicated that Byelorussian women favoured the conclusion of a world treaty on the renunciation of the use of force in international relations as an important step towards removing the threat of war, increasing international security and making détente irreversible. Indeed, peace, social progress and independence were the essential prerequisites for genuine equality and progress for women, and women everywhere actively supported the Declaration and draft resolution submitted by the Soviet Union in document A/32/242.

35. Problems relating to the position of women in society did not exist in the

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(Mrs. Mitskevich, Byelorussian SSR)

countries of the socialist community because they had made a major and successful effort to integrate women in the productive process in a manner consistent with their family and civic duties. On the sixtieth anniversary of the October Revolution, women in her country had full equality not only in theory but also in practice. The recently adopted new Soviet Constitution spelled out their right to economic, cultural and social equality and also provided for the implementation of those rights in order to give women every opportunity to work productively for the good of society. Work was essential to the over-all development of a women's personality and enhanced her role in political and social life and in the family. In the Byelorussian SSR more than 90 per cent of the women of working age were engaged in social production in every area, including industry, agriculture, transport, health, education, culture and science. A large percentage of her country's highly trained specialists were women - more than in any country with a different social structure. Their number continued to increase in branches requiring high degrees of skill and specialization rather than physical strength, such as the educational, medical and legal professions. That was possible because her country had long since solved the problem of providing equal educational opportunities for women. Indeed, the right to free and compulsory education, as well as a full range of advanced educational opportunities in every field, was reflected not only in the provisions of the new Constitution of the USSR but also in the number of students in secondary and higher educational establishments. Women were also well represented at every level of Government. Nearly 48 per cent of the persons elected to the local Soviets of working peoples deputed in June 1977 were women, and women held the offices of Secretary of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian SSR, Deputy Chairman of the Presidium and Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers. Women were also broadly represented in various public organizations such as trade unions, professional groups and factory committees.

36. However, while the equality and increasing political and productive activity of women were among the most important characteristics of Soviet democracy, Soviet women retained their great right and duty to be mothers and home-makers. Motherhood in socialist society was regarded as an important social function and was therefore protected by a broad network of facilities to ensure the health and welfare of mothers and children, including creches, kindergartens, day-care centres, summer camps and so forth.

37. Soviet women unswervingly supported the broadening of solidarity with all working people who were struggling for freedom and independence and for the unity of the international women's movement. That was not surprising, for the Byelorussian SSR alone had lost one quarter of its population in World War II and the hideous suffering produced by that conflict had not been forgotten. It was no wonder that the women of her country were working actively for peace. They understood that the strengthening of international peace and security, détente, co-operation between States with different social and economic systems, general and complete disarmament, the elimination of colonialism and racism and the right to self-determination were the basic pre-conditions for solving all of the most important problems of the day, including that of securing the basic rights of

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(Mrs. Mitskevich, Byelorussian SSR)

women. That idea had been reflected at the international meeting called "Women and Socialism" which had met in Moscow in 1977 to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. On that occasion the Byelorussian representatives, together with the representatives of 50 countries and international organizations, had unanimously recognized that in ensuring the genuine equality of women socialist society had provided one of the clearest proofs of its genuinely democratic character.

38. The Byelorussian SSR had actively supported the proclamation of the United Nations Decade for Women and felt that it was essential to stress the direct link between the Decade and the tasks of economic and social development, as well as the fact that the "women's problem" was not an isolated problem but was closely linked to the struggle for disarmament, lasting peace and international security and co-operation.

39. She expressed her delegation's deep satisfaction with the elaboration of the draft Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and felt that its adoption would demonstrate the determination of the United Nations, in the words of its Charter, "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small".

40. Mr. ZELNER GONÇALVES (Brazil) said that awareness of problems relating to women was growing in the United Nations as more women were beginning to take part in the nation-building process. Women already constituted 34 per cent of the total world labour force. That was a relatively recent development, however, and despite remarkable improvement in the past 50 years there was still much to be done. The basic problem was that in many countries, such as his own, the participation of women in the labour force was concentrated at the lowest level. Brazil had, accordingly, taken an active part in such important efforts to enhance the status of women, both legally and practically, at the Mexico Conference, which it regarded as a major step forward. The improvement of the status of women and the development process were interdependent, however, and the basic guideline for his country was that women could not be considered as an isolated segment of the population but shared with men a very important role and enormous responsibilities.

41. His delegation also felt that the efforts of the United Nations could be effective only if its recommendations were flexible enough to allow each Member State to adopt guidelines appropriate to its own circumstances. A set of principles that might seem to fit the realities of one Member State was not necessarily the ideal standard for another. Each Government should implement the recommendations of the United Nations, but must itself determine the best way to meet its own needs. That did not imply that his Government rejected the positive contribution of non-governmental organizations to the cause of women. On the contrary, it was convinced that their experience and goodwill were very valuable. The basic task of planning and promoting the integrated development of societies as a whole, however, was primarily the responsibility of Governments.

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(Mr. Zelner Gonçalves, Brazil)

42. Brazil had acceded to most of the conventions concerning the status of women but realized that the signing of international instruments was not enough, and that total equality was not a goal to be attained in a decade. Brazil had taken the lead in increasing women's participation in the decision-making progress of the country and had enacted legislation to ensure women's equality in every sphere, including special provisions where necessary. Brazil's Congress, however, had recently decided that matters related to women should be reviewed and readapted to the country's new realities. Although Brazil's laws on women were among the most progressive in the world, it was felt that the country should not have so many protective bills. The whole legal framework would therefore be reviewed so as to abolish the excessive protection which seemed to individualize the role of women in society too much and, in a way, to discriminate against men. The laws relating to maternity would, of course, remain as they were. It was also felt that there were some discrepancies between the law and the de facto situation, and it had been suggested that the Government should establish a post at the ministerial level to study and propose specific measures to improve the implementation of constitutional and other regulations providing for equality.

43. With respect to the 1980 World Conference, he hoped that the regional commissions would do their preparatory work with great care so as to avoid the problem which had arisen at the International Conference in Mexico City, where discussion of the Plan of Action had to be limited because of the enormous quantity of new proposals and ideas submitted. The regional approaches probably constituted the best way to review the Programme of the Decade because the specific characteristics of each group of nations could be dealt with more easily within the regional commissions. Brazil was accordingly taking an active part in the work of ECLA.

44. His Government had also noted with concern that some of the major efforts planned were jeopardized by lack of funds, and it was pleased to announce that it would contribute to the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women and to the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women an amount which would be announced during the pledging conference scheduled for 8 November.

45. His delegation was also fully convinced that the adoption of the draft Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women would be a most significant step towards achieving the objectives of the Decade and it would make specific comments on the document after exchanging views with other delegations. For the time being he wished to assure the members of the Committee that his delegation was in a position to support the draft Convention as a whole, subject to the redrafting of certain articles, and felt that it could provide a good basis for a general consensus.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.