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Twenty-sixth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 637th MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 16 September 1976, at 3.35 p.m.

Chairman: Mrs. GONZALEZ de CUADROS (Colombia)

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THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN: EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE,
1976-1985 (agenda item 4) (continued):

- (a) EVALUATION OF ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN DURING THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR
(E/CN.6/593)
- (b) THE PROGRAMME FOR DECADE AND RELATED QUESTIONS INCLUDING TECHNICAL
CO-OPERATION ACTIVITIES (E/CN.6/594 and Corr.1, 595, 597, 603 and 604)
- (c) REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF PROGRESS MADE UNDER THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
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OF THE WORLD PLAN OF ACTION (E/CN.6/598, 599)
- (d) PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE 1980 CONFERENCE (E/CN.6/600; E/CN.6/NGO/258)

1. Mrs. NIKOLAEVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) noted that, in resolution 3520 (XXX), the General Assembly had proclaimed for the United Nations Decade for Women the same objectives as for the International Women's Year, namely, equality, development and peace. In pursuance of those objectives, the Decade would be devoted to effective measures designed to implement the World Plan of Action adopted by the 1975 Conference.

2. It was now apparent that the Year had been an outstanding success: throughout the world progressive forces had received a fresh stimulus and the political consciousness of women had increased. The international democratic movement among women was growing and was playing an extremely significant part in national liberation movements. The Year had, in fact, marked not the end, but the beginning, of the development of the international women's movement and of broader measures for the strengthening of peace and the achievement of national liberation. A decisive role in implementing the Plan of Action during the Decade would be played by Governments, which would have to mobilize all the forces and means of communication at their disposal. The efforts of women should, of course, be concentrated on the attainment of the three objectives that had been proclaimed.

3. As regards the first one, great attention should be paid to the elimination of discrimination in employment - an area in which the ILO had a very important part to play. Indeed, everything possible should be done to enhance the rights and opportunities of working women, in accordance with the programme of action adopted by the ILO in June 1975, and particular attention should be paid to working women with children. The proclamation of the Decade had served to emphasize the importance of the role of the Commission, which must obviously intensify its activities and use all possible means of drawing the attention of the international community to the need to combat discrimination against women. In that connexion, it would be extremely useful to draw on the experience of the socialist countries and of those developing countries whose efforts to emancipate women had been crowned with success.

4. In connexion with the Decade's second objective, namely, development; due attention should be paid to the problems of women in the developing countries and the developed capitalist countries. Many countries were at present facing urgent and disparate social and economic problems which must be solved in order to ensure the well-being of their citizens. Those problems were especially difficult since they were interrelated, but an improvement in the status of women would undoubtedly contribute to their solution. In that connexion, there was an urgent need to combat illiteracy, and the necessary campaign must be waged in close co-operation with the United Nations and UNESCO.

5. Particular attention should be paid to women in rural areas, who had no access to insurance schemes, were subjected to primitive working conditions, had no stable working hours and received extremely low wages; the USSR had considerable experience in dealing with problems in rural areas which it was willing to impart to other countries. In the developed capitalist countries, attention should be paid to the effects of scientific and technical progress on women who, as a result of the introduction of new technologies, were sometimes deprived of employment opportunities or were subjected to new stresses. The problem was certainly serious because, according to the ILO Bulletin of Labour Statistics, seven million women had lost their jobs in 23 developed capitalist countries as a result of the economic crisis.

6. The third objective of the Decade - peace - could be promoted by intensifying the role of women in efforts to achieve peace and détente, and in the struggle against racism, colonialism, repression and apartheid. Those activities should be reflected in the decisions of the various United Nations bodies, including the Commission. In that connexion, her delegation eagerly awaited the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 3519 (XXX) concerning women's participation in the strengthening of international peace and security and in the struggle against colonialism, racism, racial discrimination, foreign aggression and occupation and all forms of foreign domination. She was confident that the Commission would initiate appropriate activities in order to remain abreast of the tasks confronting it.

7. There was a close link between the United Nations Decade for Women and the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination. The success of the Decade for Women could be ensured by establishing close links between the three objectives of the Decade and by mobilizing all available resources so that all the activities planned could be undertaken.

8. Miss ZAHARAN (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), introducing her Organization's report on its activities of special interest to women (E/CN.6/604), said that since the 1975 Conference in Mexico UNESCO had expanded those activities, and had successfully adopted an integrated approach to problems affecting women. The part played by UNESCO in the International Women's Year was outlined in the report. It had been active in four major areas: the promotion of exchanges of information between women in Member States; the relationship between equal education opportunities and equal employment opportunities; activities for the benefit of women in rural areas, including functional literacy programmes; and research on the philosophical, historical and cultural issues which affected women in society. In carrying out those tasks, UNESCO had co-operated successfully

with non-governmental organizations and national commissions on the status of women. She also drew attention to resolution 16.1 adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its eighteenth session (E/CN.6/604, annex I), in which it had called for a concentrated effort to improve the situation of women in the areas of education, science, culture and communications.

9. Paragraphs 12-17 of document E/CN.6/604 contained complete information on developments with regard to UNESCO's normative activities, while its work in the field of exchanges of information and experience, in accordance with the Plan of Action adopted at Mexico City, was described in paragraphs 18-34. In addition, reports on research in many new areas relating to the status of women had been prepared by independent national experts in six countries. Yet another major area in which UNESCO had been active was education and employment, in which it had co-operated closely with the ILO, as indicated in paragraphs 35-50.

10. Many delegations had referred to the importance of assistance to women in rural areas. UNESCO was particularly concerned with that problem and was undertaking a large number of programmes for the training of teachers and literacy instructors - programmes in which women were closely involved. UNESCO's activities in that area were described in paragraphs 51-79.

11. The report provided information on only a few of UNESCO's activities of special interest to women; further information on any of its activities could be provided on request to delegations. UNESCO was aware that much remained to be done, and felt the International Women's Year had given a fresh impetus to its work - an impetus which would continue throughout the Decade.

12. Mrs. DAHLERUP (Denmark) said that activities undertaken in connexion with the International Women's Year had aroused considerable public interest in her country. The Danish women's organizations which had played a major part in preparing and organizing those activities were already planning follow-up activities for 1977. Emphasis was placed on helping the male members of society to achieve a better understanding of their role in family life. A council had been set up under her chairmanship to ensure the implementation, in Denmark, of the Declaration of Mexico. One major goal had already been achieved by the introduction of equal pay in February 1976, and further legislation on equal treatment of women in employment was under consideration. It should not be assumed, however, that Danish women were entirely free from problems, and her delegation was anxious to hear the views of others on how the remainder of the Declaration could best be put into practice.

13. Ms. HENDSCH (United States of America) drew attention to the work done by the United States National Commission for the International Women's Year, which had a direct bearing on the priorities to be established for the United Nations Decade for Women. The Commission, consisting of 33 individuals appointed by the President, had worked for 11 months on a number of priority areas including, in particular, the role of women in the arts and humanities; the question of child development; the enforcement of laws; the question of equal rights; government organization structures; social security for home-makers; international

interdependence; international conventions; communications media; the problem of rape; family planning; special problems of women; women in employment, particularly in non-traditional fields; and the integration of women in the power structure. All those questions had been studied with the participation of the relevant Federal agencies. One of the most interesting projects that had emerged was the enactment of legislation which would permit the holding of large numbers of separate conferences throughout the United States focusing attention on the need for improvement in the status of women. The recommendations of those conferences would be transmitted to a national conference, to be held at a later date. The conferences themselves would be held late in 1976 or early in 1977, and their results would be put before the President late in 1977. It was hoped that delegates from as many countries as possible would attend the conferences as observers or guests.

14. Mrs. BRUCE (Assistant Director, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs) said that, in view of the Commission's wish to focus on all the sub-items of agenda item 4, she proposed to introduce a number of documents which she had not discussed in her earlier statement at the 633rd meeting. Referring to document E/CN.6/594, she drew special attention to section III. The programme outlined in that section was rather general in content, and delegations' comments and suggestions were invited, particularly as regards the phasing of the programme. Some members had expressed the view that undue emphasis was placed on research in Section B of the programme (Integration of women in development). In that connexion she pointed out that only the first three of the studies listed under sub-section (b) had been initiated to date. The Commission was required to submit a preliminary report to the thirty-first session of the General Assembly on the extent to which women participated in agriculture, trade, industry and science and technology; it was hoped that that report would help in developing a more dynamic programme. It would be seen that the emphasis at present was on international and regional action rather than national action, and it was hoped that, with the help of comments and suggestions from the Commission's members, the latter aspect could also be developed.

15. Referring to sub-item 4 (c) (Review and appraisal of progress made under the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade and in the implementation of the World Plan of Action), she said that the procedural aspect of the question was outlined in document E/CN.6/599. The substantive document (E/CN.6/598 and Add.1) represented an attempt at an initial review and appraisal. There again, members' comments and suggestions would be extremely welcome. It was desirable that the first review and appraisal should contain some findings and conclusions on major trends and policies with regard to the status of women. A preliminary analysis of reports received from Governments to date was given in document E/CN.6/598/Add.2.

16. Lastly, turning to sub-item 4 (d), she drew attention to the note by the Secretary-General on preparatory work for the 1980 Conference (E/CN.6/600) and, in particular, to the annex to that document which dealt with the programme budget implications of the Conference; a revised set of detailed proposals would have to be submitted to the General Assembly in 1977. The recommendations of the Commission's present session would be transmitted to the Economic and Social Council's Committee on Review and Appraisal at its next session in May 1977.

17. Ms. SERRY (Egypt) said that, judging by the activities referred to in document E/CN.6/593, the International Women's Year had been a historic point of departure for the emancipation of women. Her delegation noted with satisfaction that the activities undertaken had helped to bring about legislative changes in favour of women in various countries and a growing awareness that women's problems were closely related to problems of economic and social development. Governments had realised that women's problems could no longer be considered in isolation from society's other problems and had therefore taken steps to amend laws which discriminated against women and had created services to improve their lot.

18. Her delegation was of the opinion that the timing of the International Women's Year and the Decade for Women had been extremely judicious in that those two events coincided with the Second United Nations Development Decade and with the programme for the establishment of a new international economic order, which focused attention on the importance of questions relating to social and economic development, particularly in developing countries. Since women accounted for one-half of the international community, it was essential for them to be fully integrated into the development process. To that end, the national commissions which had been established to prepare for the International Women's Year must continue and be made responsible for the implementation of the programme for the Decade for Women.

19. Mrs. HUSSEIN (Egypt), referring to the task entrusted to the Commission, namely, to identify trends and define policies to supplement the priorities already described in the World Plan of Action, said that the Secretariat had made valuable suggestions concerning studies and research which might be carried out at the international level. Any decisions adopted by the Commission should, however, reflect interests at the grass-roots level and highlight action to be taken at the national level. For example, the decisions taken in connexion with the establishment of an International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women should embody recommendations relating to co-operation with national agencies, as had been done in the case of UNESCO research on the obstacles to the participation of women in development. Her delegation was also of the opinion that some of the planners in the Commission could transform the World Plan of Action into a practical instrument which would stress the importance of national machinery in the implementation of the programme for the Decade for Women.

20. Mrs. FERRER GOMEZ (Cuba) commended the Secretariat on the preparation of the documents relating to agenda item 4, but regretted that they had not been made available earlier and failed to mention the activities carried out in Cuba during

the International Women's Year. For example, in September 1974, her Government had established a national commission, composed of government bodies dealing with women's problems, to carry out activities to prepare for the World Conference and publicize the International Women's Year. In addition, her Government had adopted a new family code, which provided for the full equality of women and men in marriage and in the family, and established the rights and obligations of married couples with respect to the education and training of their children.

21. In September 1975, her country had organized a seminar of Central American and Caribbean women at Havana, under the auspices of the International Democratic Federation of Women and UNESCO. Moreover, discussions held throughout the country and organized by workers, women and students had contributed to progress in efforts to eradicate prejudices about the role of women in society. The International Women's Year had offered Cuba an opportunity to promote greater awareness of the situation of women and of the need for their integration in all aspects of national life. The Decade for Women would be of even greater importance, and the programme for the Decade should increase possibilities for the attainment of complete equality by women. The technical co-operation activities included in the programme for the Decade were extremely valuable, particularly to developing countries, and would help to associate women with the development effort, whose success depended on society as a whole and on the opportunities given to women to play their rightful role on an equal footing with men.

22. Mrs. DEVAUD (France) said that many administrative and legislative measures had been taken in her country during the International Women's Year. For instance, the former Secretary of State for the Status of Women had adopted an original approach to women's problems by drawing up a programme, approved by the Government, which contained measures to be implemented in the next five years designed to improve the status of women of all ages.

23. Referring to the programme for the Decade for Women and the Conference to be held in 1980, she noted that some delegations considered that the programme entailed too much research. In her view, however, research was necessary and should be planned in even greater detail so that it could be translated into effective action. Such research implied the need for a methodology that would produce uniform data, and to that end, it would be extremely useful to study the problems of women in various regions of the world. Once information on regional problems had been obtained and collated, priority should be given to action to improve the status of the millions of illiterate and poverty-stricken women in rural areas, who had an important role to play in the development process because they were, in fact, the ones who satisfied the most basic needs of the population of their respective countries. Subsequently, attention could be focused on the improvement of the status of women through better education, training and employment opportunities and involvement in the decision-making process. In that connexion, she noted that women in most countries did not yet enjoy important responsibilities and decision-making power, and that they would be able to achieve real equality with men only through political power. One of the main objectives of the Decade for Women should therefore be to increase recognition of the fact that the future of the world lay in the hands of women.

24. Mrs. SAYEGH (Observer for the Palestine Liberation Organization), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said that General Assembly resolution 3250 (XXX) proclaiming the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, and the decisions and recommendations of the World Conference of International Women's Year, which reflected growing awareness of the rights of women, had drawn attention to the need for their full participation in all aspects of social life and for the establishment of political institutions for the elimination of discrimination against women and their integration in the development process. The various meetings held during the International Women's Year had led to better mutual understanding and would have a pronounced effect not only on the struggles of women, but also on the course of history.

25. The resolutions and decisions relating to the Palestine issue and Palestinian women adopted at the World Conference and at the World Congress of Women at Berlin in 1975 had demonstrated the support of women throughout the world for the struggle of Palestinian women, who took the view that discrimination against women could not be eliminated as long as countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America were denied their political independence and as long as colonial powers continued to plunder their resources. The Palestinian women would continue their struggle for equal rights despite the fact that they had been denied the right to life and existence in their own country. The liberation of Palestinian women could not be separated from the struggle for the liberation of Palestinian land and society.

26. In addition to their participation in the political struggle, Palestinian women had, during the International Women's Year, concentrated on activities relating to their particular situation. For example, they had established medical centres for women and children and had carried out vaccination campaigns to prevent the spread of epidemics and disease. They had established committees to care for the wounded in hospitals and had created child-care centres, especially in Lebanon, to relieve mothers of some of their family obligations. Commissions had been set up to support the population and care for families who had lost their homes and jobs. The Palestinian women had also helped to create several training schools and had organized conferences and seminars on political subjects. They had organized and managed fairs and markets for the handicrafts produced by women in occupied Palestine and in exile. Such activities had been very successful and had contributed to the increased participation of women in the decision-making process. In that connexion, she noted that the Palestinian National Charter recognized the complete equality of women, but added that Palestinian women were nevertheless aware of the fact that their achievements could be made irreversible only through constant struggle.

27. As a result of the military and political situation in Lebanon, Palestinian women lacked the most basic amenities, such as water, food, medical care, housing and education, and were exposed to the permanent threat of the loss of their families. They appealed to the women of the world to provide them with moral and material support, and urged the implementation of General Assembly resolution 3236 (XXIX), which reaffirmed the inalienable right to self-determination of the Palestinian people in Palestine and would enable Palestinian women to play their role in the struggle of women throughout the world for a better and more just society.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.