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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 25th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KABORE (Burkina Faso)

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

AGENDA ITEM 94: INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING INSTITUTE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued) (A/44/409 and Corr.1 and 2-S/20743; A/44/416)

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AGENDA ITEM 104: FORWARD-LOOKING STRATEGIES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN TO THE YEAR 2000 (continued)

- (a) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NAIROBI FORWARD-LOOKING STRATEGIES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (A/44/511)
- (b) UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR WOMEN (A/44/389)
- (c) IMPROVEMENT OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE SECRETARIAT
- (d) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND CO-OPERATION
- (e) NATIONAL EXPERIENCE RELATING TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS (A/44/516)

1. Mr. BUZO (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that the international community's increasing attention to the situation of women arose from the realization that the human community could not consider itself civilized if more than half of its members still suffered from discrimination. Even modern technological improvements had not done much to alleviate the burdens of women, who still frequently had to do heavy, dangerous and unattractive work.

2. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women required national and international measures to ensure their successful implementation. Of crucial importance in that connection was universal accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. More than one third of the States Members of the United Nations were still not bound by that Convention and he urged all those countries that had not yet done so to accede to it. His delegation greatly appreciated the work done by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and supported those resolutions that were designed to guarantee it the resources it needed to take effective action.

3. In the Byelorussian SSR equality between the sexes was guaranteed by law. The figures showed that women in his country participated in political life at all levels. Still, in the climate of perestroika and glasnost, his country was reviewing problems relating to women, with particular attention to rural women, and especially those living in the area contaminated by the Chernobyl accident. A 17 billion rouble programme had been instituted to resettle 100,000 people and the

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(Mr. Buzo, Byelorussian SSR)

country still faced the task of integrating the displaced persons, including women, into the economic and social life of their new communities. For that reason his country was especially interested in the experience of other countries in improving the situation of rural women.

4. The Commission on the Status of Women was the most appropriate body for discussing the situation of women, for finding new ways for the United Nations to implement the Nairobi Strategies, for the exchange of national experience and the development of alternative approaches to achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. The expanded and extended session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 1990 would undoubtedly provide additional impetus for fruitful international co-operation in formulating and implementing the necessary measures at the national level.

5. His country would work to promote implementation of the Nairobi Strategies and was prepared to co-operate with all other countries in promoting the goals of peace, equality and development so that further progress could be made in improving the situation of women.

6. Mrs. McLENNAN (United States of America) said that for women to achieve equality, development and peace they must have the legal right and opportunity to participate in political life and decision-making. As the example of her own country showed, the more women who held public office, the more responsive political institutions would be to reforms that promoted equality of the sexes. Political rights must also be supplemented by better education. Two thirds of the world's illiterates were women, and only education could enable women to become equal partners in society.

7. Women must also share fully in economic development and to do so they must have access to credit and capital and the right to own property, thereby enabling them to enjoy the fruits of their labour. Government must foster the economic development of women by protecting their economic, political and social rights. The status of women was adversely affected by low literacy, high population growth, judicial systems and economic infrastructures biased against equality of the sexes and non-economic factors such as drought, flood, war and political turmoil. Those problems were further exacerbated by inappropriate domestic economic policies.

8. The United States development assistance programmes were designed to co-ordinate the integration of women in the kind of development that would benefit all sectors of society and stressed the important contributions that women entrepreneurs could make when given the necessary resources. At home her Government promoted the integration of women in the economic development process by encouraging business ownership by women.

9. The United Nations must give high priority to women's issues but, given its limited resources should concentrate on women in the developing countries, whose problems were often a matter of life and death. Women's issues must be included in the discussion of economic development throughout the United Nations system and her

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(Mrs. McLennan, United States)

Government welcomed the resolutions designed to ensure the integration of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies throughout the United Nations system by using biennial monitoring reports and a record of intergovernmental resolutions and decisions. Her delegation commended the efforts of the Advisory Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), UNDP, UNIFEM and UNIDO to help women in their various areas of competence. It encouraged the Secretary-General to increase the number of women in the Secretariat and would like to have a progress report from the Secretariat on progress in achieving that goal. The work of the Economic and Social Council and the Second Committee on the integration of women in economic development must also be actively supported and encouraged.

10. Her delegation did not agree with the manner in which the Commission on the Status of Women had been expanded and would not regard it as a precedent-setting example for other bodies. The Commission should leave political discussions to other forums and concentrate on finding practical solutions to the problems facing women. It should be a forum for dialogue between the developed and developing countries so that experience could be shared in finding solutions to the problems of all women. Its resolutions should be simple and clear and provide meaningful recommendations for improving the status of women. Political differences must be put aside in pursuit of the common goal of benefiting women everywhere.

11. Miss AIOUAZE (Algeria) stressed the urgent need for action to help the most disadvantaged women and to respond as a matter of priority to the needs of women in developing countries. Remedial measures should focus on all women and should also deal with the question of inequality among women. Ways must be found to enable all women to exercise their rights in the context of the commitment of the international community to social progress and better living conditions for all.

12. The progress made in implementing the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women had been very modest. There were still obstacles to be overcome in all spheres of activity. That was not surprising in view of the blatant inequalities in the international economic system and the fact that in many regions of the world the inalienable right of peoples to self-determination continued to be violated.

13. In resolution 1989/45 the Economic and Social Council had taken a number of decisions on the enlargement of the Commission on the Status of Women. The changes in the Commission's structure would have a positive impact on its work. The increased representation of African, Asian and Latin American and Caribbean States reflected the desire of third world countries to strengthen their role in international matters.

14. Mrs. SHERMAN-PETER (Bahamas) stressed the urgent need to translate the commitment to equality of men and women into coherent strategies for accelerating efforts to promote women's equality. Governments must play a pivotal role in changing attitudes and values of both men and women and integrating women into every aspect of national life. The Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000 continued to offer vast opportunities for creative action.

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(Mrs. Sherman-Peter, Bahamas)

Her delegation regretted that efforts to implement the Strategies had slowed down and hoped that the international community would take decisive steps to reverse that trend. At its thirty-fourth session in 1990, the Commission on the Status of Women should focus its attention primarily on moving from apparent stagnation to more dynamic participation in achieving the goals of equality, development and peace.

15. Economic and Social Council resolution 1989/32 urged that in order to provide guidance in the formulation of draft recommendations and conclusions, information on the preliminary results of the review and appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies should be made available to an open-ended group of Member States. The Bahamas was confident that the working group could assist the Commission and favoured approaches that encouraged Governments to undertake accelerated and sustained activities to promote equality of men and women, particularly public information activities and programmes to increase awareness among women of their legal rights.

16. Public discussion and the dissemination of information on women was encouraged in the Bahamas. Forums such as the annual national women's conference were invaluable in finding solutions to problems affecting women. The 1989 conference would focus primarily on the issue of literacy and also consider questions relating to employment, housing and legislation. Her Government attached importance to support services to enable women to carry out their various obligations. Child care was one of the most pressing issues to be addressed in both developed and developing countries in that regard. Her Government was committed to providing a comprehensive child-care system.

17. Although there was no impediment to female participation in the political process in the Bahamas, women were underrepresented in politics and labour unions. However, the participation of women in the civil service and the labour force in general was significant. They constituted a majority in the civil service, both in mid-level and high-level decision-making positions, and filled approximately 80 per cent of the positions in the foreign service. A solid foundation, therefore, existed for extending women's participation to other areas. She hoped that the recommendations and conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women would promote women's participation in the political arena and address the problem of women's apparent apathy about political careers.

18. She noted with regret that the target set by the United Nations for increasing the number of women in posts subject to geographical distribution had not been met and that the number of women in high-level decision-making positions was only slightly above the world average. The Organization must meet its targets and set an example that Member States could emulate. The Bahamas recognized the efforts made by United Nations bodies to recruit and promote capable women and urged that that matter should continue to be given priority.

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(Mrs. Sherman-Peter, Bahamas)

19. The world economic situation had a particularly adverse effect on women, leading to their further marginalization. The integration of women into the development process not only improved their status but was crucial for development. Accordingly, the Commission on the Status of Women should put forward action-oriented recommendations to promote international co-operation for development and ensure that women would not bear the brunt of structural adjustment policies. In view of the critical role of education in development efforts, an educational system that discriminated against women was counter-productive. In the Bahamas, equal participation in education at all levels was a firm government policy. More females than males were graduating from secondary schools and the ratio of women to men in continuing education was better than 2 to 1.

20. In considering the question of peace, the Commission should address the issue of violence or fear of violence directed against women. The Bahamian Parliament was currently considering a bill on sexual offences and domestic violence, and the Government was studying recommendations to provide shelter to battered women. Increased international attention should also be given to the hundreds of children in southern Africa that had been killed in war. War also constituted an assault on African women, the mothers of those children.

21. She expressed satisfaction with the efforts of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women to adopt a comprehensive approach to the integration of women in development. The work by the United Nations Development Fund for Women in underscoring the importance of the contribution of women and women's economic concerns was also commendable.

22. Mr. QURESHI (Pakistan) commended the work being carried out in many areas by the Commission on the Status of Women. Achieving the objectives of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies required action at the national level, supported by international co-operation. Meaningful progress could be achieved only in favourable socio-economic conditions. Underdevelopment, poverty, hunger and disease were factors that adversely affected the advancement of women in developing societies. A transformation of attitudes and practices could not be brought about without a corresponding change in the socio-economic environment. It was hoped that the Commission would take account of the problems faced by developing countries in their efforts to improve conditions for women.

23. The impressive accomplishments of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) were a source of immense satisfaction. He hoped that UNIFEM would be able to increase its resources in the years to come. Pakistan continued to contribute to the Fund and had also pledged contributions to INSTRAW and UNFPA.

24. Islam ensured the human dignity and fundamental equality of women. As an Islamic State, Pakistan was committed to safeguarding the rights of women and protecting their social, economic, legal and political status. Under its Constitution, all citizens were equal before the law and entitled to equal protection. Women were afforded equal employment opportunities. They held important positions in the Government and played an active role in national development efforts as teachers, doctors and engineers.

(Mr. Qureshi, Pakistan)

25. The Government of Pakistan had established a Ministry for Women's Development for the purpose of promoting the participation of women in all sectors of development. The Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women, established in 1984, would soon issue a report containing recommendations to the Government for effective safeguards for women's rights, and the 1988-1993 five-year plan incorporated policy measures and projects for integrating women into the economic and social development of the country.

26. While Pakistan agreed with the main thrust of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and had taken measures to prevent discrimination on the basis of sex, it opposed attempts to use the Convention as an instrument of pressure against developing countries in general and Islamic countries in particular. His country was pleased by the adoption of Economic and Social Council resolution 1988/48 concerning the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and by the omission from the resolution of any reference to the studies on Islam.

27. Despite its limited resources, Pakistan was doing its best to look after the more than 3 million refugees on its soil, most of whom were women, children and older people. It was important that appropriate steps should be taken by the international community to create conditions for the safe, honourable and voluntary return of the refugees to their homeland.

28. Mr. WILENSKI (Australia), speaking on behalf of Canada, New Zealand and Australia, expressed their dismay at the stagnation of efforts to improve the status of women in the Secretariat. That lack of progress was all the more regrettable in an organization whose Charter asserted the equal rights of men and women and placed efficiency, competence and integrity before all other considerations in the evaluation of its staff. Moreover, as studies had shown, if women were not included among the decision-makers, the needs of women tended to be systematically neglected or ignored in the administration of public programmes, a particularly important consideration in the context of the United Nations. However, it was actually not surprising that no progress had been made. As experience had shown, the status of women in an organization improved only when there was a specific, funded unit that could act with authority on their behalf.

29. His delegation, like those of Canada and New Zealand, was further dismayed that no progress report had been received on the reconstituted Steering Committee for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat and that the relevant progress report to the Commission on the Status of Women, requested in resolution 43/103 of the General Assembly, had not been submitted. Moreover, there was no reference at all to the programme for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat in the Secretary-General's report on the work of the United Nations (A/44/1). In the circumstances, they wished to ask the Assistant Secretary-General of the Office of Human Resources Management serving as the focal point for women in the Secretariat to report orally to the Committee at the earliest convenient occasion on steps taken to reach the 1990 targets.

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(Mr. Wilenski, Australia)

30. The current programme would expire in 1990. In formulating a new programme, an attempt should be made to set specific, realizable targets and to arrive at a strategy of implementation that was built on the political will of members and relied on the best professional resources available.

31. He was pleased to note that the United States delegation wished to associate itself with the general approach outlined in the Australian statement.

32. Mr. SAAD (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, took issue with the statement of Israel condemning violence against women. He was surprised that Israel dared to speak of the rights of women when Israeli forces beat, tortured and killed Palestinian women every day.

33. Mrs. SIMHA (Israel) said that the Israeli statement had addressed the topic of domestic violence, which was of utmost importance to society and to the family. The representative of Syria was using the occasion to bring forth a long list of slogans on a different form of violence. However, he failed to mention the real violence committed against women by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which cynically put women and children on the frontline and liquidated all those who contested the use of violence as the sole means of resolving the Palestinian problem. Peace would come only when the Arabs abandoned war and terrorism, which affected Palestinian and Israeli women alike, and agreed to bilateral negotiations with no conditions based on the acceptance of Israel's right to exist.

34. Mr. SAAD (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, regretted that the Committee had been forced to listen to a long speech on an irrelevant topic. Israel, which had a bloody, massacre-laden history and whose acts of violence against Palestinian women were shown on Western television, was in a poor position to accuse the PLO of terrorism vis-à-vis Palestinian women.

35. Mrs. SIMHA (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the fact that Syria bombed Lebanon every day invalidated any comments it might wish to make about terrorism.

36. Mrs. WARZAZI (Morocco), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that after the Second World War and the German occupation of France, France had executed all Nazi collaborators. PLO executions of Israeli collaborators should be seen in the same light.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.