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STATEMENT MADE BY  
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ON ECOSOC REPORT, CHAP. XIV, SEC. A - "REPORT OF THE  
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN"

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Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

Mr. Chairman,

1. Women as a force for social change

Not too long ago an official report of the Secretariat raised a few thought-provoking questions:

"Is the voice of women being heard, and, if heard, is it heeded ?

Is it in fact recognized that women have a significant role to play in helping to build a better world for all ?

Has it even been considered that some of the major issues of today -- the maintenance of peace, the elimination of poverty, the problems of the human environment, the effects of the population explosion -- might have been approached with greater impact if women had a greater share in their discussion ? " (E/CN.6/532, para. 13-14).

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These questions remain alive and pertinent, as the seminars on "the participation of women in the economic life of their countries," held in Moscow in September 1970 and in Libreville in August 1971 have clearly shown.

A communality of awareness of their situation among women in the world today emerges from the reports of those seminars. Such a fact points out to a unity of purpose and interests that is gaining momentum since the mid-60's. In fact, inside and outside the United Nations Organization, a profound shift has taken place in regard to the situation of women in society whatever

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its particular tradition has been.

For a long time, women as individuals were at the center of attention of most protective or promotional measures.

Even the women's rights movements in the West in the beginning of the century, wanting to give to each woman her individuals right as a person, had a strong conventional touch with their "strictly Constitutional approach."<sup>(1)</sup>

Today, it is the social group constituted by women who emerge as an underprivileged, discriminated against, oppressed sector of mankind. Such a group includes the rural women who carry the heavy weight of coping with the most under-developed sector of human activity as well as the women in the big cities commuting frantically between home and work with scarcely a minute for themselves. At the two extremes of the economic development process the question can be raised, as it was a few years ago in a study-week in France:

"La femme a-t-elle le temps de vivre?" --  
 "does woman have time to live?"

No wonder then that the awareness of forming a group which is discriminated against will be a phenomenon of international dimensions.

We are facing a totally new sociological phenomenon, whose political meaning cannot be overlooked.

In the analysis of most sociologists, the new phenomenon of women's awareness of their role in society is linked with the other movements which have sprung up

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since the beginning of the industrialization era. It goes far back to the workers movement (either in proletarian struggle or in trade-union terms), to the emancipation of ethnical minorities, to the bursting out of the studentss movements in the last decade.

The present movement could provide Governments with a new insight into the relation between the status of women and the key-structures as well as the value-system of that given society.

It would seem that the Commission on the Status of Women would also take note of the significance of such a movement. (It is, however, rather astonishing that nowhere in the minutes of the last session of the Commission a reference to such sociological phenomenon can be found.)

Without going into all the avenues provided by the anthropological and sociological analyses of such phenomenon, it can be said today with stronger emphasis that women do affect the life of their communities, are able to question their values and to introduce new challenges.

While in the past their role was conceived as the stabilizing element, "le repos du guerrier" of a masculine-shaped society, today it is possible to say that women are and can be instrumental in social change.

It is a well known fact, as the representative of the World Federation of Trade Unions pointed out in the last session of the Commission, that "there is a close link between the elimination of discrimination

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against women and the achievement of better living and working conditions for all workers." (E/CN.6/Min.578, pag.68).

In fact, the working day of a maximum of 8 hours, the week of 48 hours, etc., were measures introduced primarily to protect women. Once conquered as rights for women they soon pointed out to the situation of inhumanity in which workers in general found themselves.

Today the problems are different and more complex but women can be instruments of a more livable world, as the forerunners of a new society which they will also be able to shape.

My concern in stressing this force of women in social change comes from the fact that the ECOSOC report scarcely conveys the scope and the depth of the work consistently done by the Commission on the Status of Women (and particularly its 24th session) as well as the tremendous support the Commission finds in the persevering, goal-oriented, intensive labour of the Secretariat in this realm.

May I take this opportunity, Mr. Chairman, to thank Mrs. Bruce, the Director of the Section on the Status of Women, of the Division of Human Rights, and her staff, for all the work done, for the initiatives taken in this field, for providing women everywhere with adequate tools to operate effectively in their communities.

It is remarkable to note how many countries, regardless of the fact of being industrialized or not, of being in the capitalistic or in the socialistic world

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have set up national commissions related in a way or another with the status of women. (My own country is not an exception. Though several national branches of NGO had been dealing for a long time with study and grass-root work related to the status of women, it wasn't until 1970 that the idea of a national commission began to take institutional shape. In fact, the regional seminar held in Romania in 1969 and the prevailing climate of common interests and aspirations among women coming from different social and political systems, led to the preparatory work needed for the constitution of a "National Commission on the participation of women in social and economic life.")

2. Present framework of the Commission on the Status of Women.

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The framework of reference of the Commission

on the Status of Women has obviously undergone a shift from its original concept.

Political rights of women were in the forefront of the Commission's concerns in its first 10 or 15 years, as women were helping to structure the post-war society. We may call this period a juridical or legalistic phase.

During the 60's two new factors had a great impact on the Commission: the admission of a great number of countries embodying new traditions, customs, values, and the launching of the I World Development Decade.

World attention was then called to the

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contribution women can give to the global development of their countries. The need is then felt for programs and norms which will enable women to participate fully in the economic, social, cultural and political life of their countries. (E/CN.6/467).

There has been a change from the basic right to vote to the political concept of full participation.

There has been a change from a phase of residual feminism --essentially individualistic and conformist -- to a phase of active involvement -- essentially community-oriented and innovative.

In her comprehensive analysis of the history of the Commission, Mrs. Bruce stressed this evolution in the following terms:

"United Nations work relating to the status of women has shifted its emphasis from the recognition of rights to the promotion and encouragement of the full and effective participation of women in all sectors of national and international life."<sup>(1)</sup>

Participation implies that full citizenships has not only a civic dimension but a social, economic, and cultural one as well. A new way of structuring society is at stake. A way that acknowledges class-struggle as a fact and tries to go beyond the dialectics of "oppressors" and "oppressed" by the full participation of all. A way that sees power not as a monolithic force

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(1) -work of the UN relating to the Status of Women in Human Rights Journal, no 2-1971.

but as a many-folded expression of leadership. In the "wonderland"-of-the-full-participation-of-everyone, power would not be concentrated at the top of the political, economic or cultural institutions but would be essentially decentralized and shared.

The implications of such a concept in the present phase of the Commission on the Status of Women leads us to very concrete questions, namely:

- Are women fully responsible in the social, economic and cultural life ?
- Are they then exercising the corresponding authority ?
- Are they centers of "decision-making" at all levels in which they operate from the family to Governmental structures ?

These questions are at the root of the recurring concern in resolutions adopted by the General Assembly in the past as well as in one of the draft-resolution before the 3rd Commission (E/RES/1676 ( LII) when stressing that women should be present at all positions of the United Nations system, "particularly at the policy-making level."

This concern gives a stronger weight to the concept of "full participation" in such a way that a third phase of the evolution of the Commission may even be dawning here. It is a phase where women cannot be anymore the object of society's concern (even if it is their own freedom that is at stake!) but where they are the subject of their own lives.

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Subject of their own lives being equated them with the responsibility to shape the world through their attentive care and work, with the ability to make history whatever the level and type of involvement provided only that women are true to themselves, with the will to create culture by the very way in which they face, criticise and decide upon their daily commitments, ranging the whole gamut from the queue of the consumer's line to the hectic pressure of the production chain.

The full implementation of these capacities will shape this phase of the Commission as strongly cultural. In such a phase, we must find mechanisms which will help women to rediscover whom they are, free from the strain and fallacy of competition with men, making their own contribution to society not as second-class citizens but as full human beings well aware at once of their communality of destiny with men and of their different way-of-being in the world.

In this context, my delegation sees with great interest, the first internal resolution of the Commission entitled "Influence of mass communication media on the formation of a new attitude towards the role of women in present-day society" (E/CN.6/568, I (XXIV)). There lies a tremendous possibility for women to watch over the images imposed on them by society, the measure in which their personnality is jeopardize by the image mass media convey, the need to discover and to propagate an image or images true to them and to this time. They will be able to realize how much mass-media reinforce the status-quo of a masculine-ruled society, introduce

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contradictory values and patterns of behaviour, and, even while presenting apparently avant-garde images, are making an appeal to ancestral myths of the communal subconscious of women.

My delegation hopes that the implementation of such a draft-resolution may open the way for all women of our countries (and not only a privileged few) to be given the chance to analyse the truth of their roles and to decide more critically about the role they want to play in society.

3. Programme of work-the legislation aspect of the status of women

With these thoughts in mind, it is my intention to review the programme of work of the Commission. In doing so, I want to pay homage to the fact that in this field the United Nations is not dealing with scattered and unrelated questions but proceeding through a systematic approach which reveals the growing rationalization of the work of the Commission. This rationalization needs to go a step further. As it has been so often pointed out, any question related to the status of women is necessarily interdisciplinary in its dimensions and intersectoral in its structural implications.

It is true that the link presently existing between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Social Development or the Commission on Population seems to indicate a clear option towards decompartmentalization.

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We are, however, still far from following through this approach in all sectors relevant to the status of women. In fact, the programme of work, instead of following clearly this line, seems to recapitulate the process undergone by the Commission during its existence, with the juridical phase, the development-oriented phase and a glimpse of the cultural phase. Therefore, I will make now a few comment on the legislation aspect of the programme, conceived as the juridical basis of the full participation of women in all sectors of society.

The first resolution of the Commission on which the ECOSOC took action ( E/RES/1677 (LII) ) helps to sharpen the juridical analysis: first, the concentration, in the reports concerning legislation aimed at the elimination of discrimination against women, from one side on political and civil rights and from the other side on social, economic and cultural rights; second, the less naive approach to legislation by appraising critically "the discrepancies between law and practice."

It is to be hoped that the clear line of work followed by the Commission in regard to the situation of women in family law will become a decisive factor to discover where are the stumbling-blocks preventing "practice" to go together with "law". Thus, the study undertaken on the "Status of women in private law" (internal resolution of the Commission 7 (XXIV)) as well as the remarkable study under way on the "status of women and family planning" (internal resolution of the Commission

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6 (XXIV)) have the full support of my country.

I cannot say the same in relation to the proposal of "new instrument or instruments of international law to eliminate discrimination against women" (internal resolution of the Commission 5 (XXIV)). This is not the adequate forum to reopen a long-standing controversy on this subject.

However, even if my delegation has serious doubts as to the technical feasibility and operational character of one instrument dealing with the totality of rights relevant to the status of women, it couldn't overlook the contribution already made in this line by the report of the Secretary-General on "Study of provisions in existing conventions that relate to the status of women" (E/CN.6/552).

This report provided an extremely valuable and comprehensive survey which can be used by Member States both as adequate guide-lines to make the comparative analysis of international declarations, conventions, etc. and national legislation and as the basic screen for evaluation of the existing international conventions, some of which -- as it was pointed by the delegate of Uruguay (E/CN.6/Min., pg. 67) and acknowledge by the ILO representative (E/CN.6/Min., pg. 73) -- are obsolete, lacking in scientific foundation and needing a definite up-dating if not radical substitution (e.g. ILO nº89 on night-work, ILO nº 127 on work prohibited to women, etc.

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4. Programme of work of the Commission --  
The integration of women in development

The second phase of the Commission's evolution is clearly shown in point 2 of its programme of work, dealing with "Programme of concerted international action to promote the advancement of women and to increase their contribution to development" as well as in point 3, dealing with "the role of women in community and national life".

The ECOSOC report incorporated in one item the five draft-resolutions submitted to it by the Commission, dealing with further implementation of "the programme of concerted international action" and covering a wide range of key-questions concerning women and development.

I perceive within this item the symptoms of the "disease" which made the I World Development Decade to fall short of its goals, namely the distinction between the activities and projects concerning the so-called "developed" countries and those concerning the so-called "developing" countries.

If women have a definite contribution to make to society, it is clear that today such contribution is most needed in the field of development. I do not mean this in terms of increasing the GNP, managing the basic structures of society inexpensively or consuming the unnecessary goods which abound in an over industrialized society. What I mean is that they can show, whatever their skill or education, the force of wisdom and genuine culture which certain societies have been able

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to preserve and which is strongly undermined by what I called last year, in this committee, the "uni-dimensional approach" to development. This approach tends to impose on the whole world the same way of living and working, by introducing everywhere what has been denounced as the "modernizing development", which is unable to solve unemployment, to deal with agriculture-based economies, to invent intermediary technology.

In order to find a global concept of development in which both industrialized and non-industrialized segments of society will be encompassed, it may be incumbent upon women of all countries to help change the present concept of industrialization -- from that of reproduction of techniques and institutions to that of invention and innovation in every situation with the universal tools technology provides.

5. Need for a more existencial approach to the status of women

There is no doubt that work has been a decisive factor in the improvement of the status of women, even if, paradoxically, we find in that realm flagrant and practically world-wide discrimination.

I presume that "equal pay for equal work" is the most existencial basis for full participation of women in economic life. There are no legislation measures capable of by-passing or compensating for such a fundamental inequality.



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new concept, such as "temps intégral", all of which would enable women to find a pattern where work, family and they as persons can become integrated.

By bringing into question the low priority given to these two items, I am in fact challenging the very premisses with which I started: does the Commission need, in its programme of work, to follow the same pattern shown in its past history? I would say no, as I would plead for a more existential starting point for the work of the Commission, where the juridical matters may be worked out only as necessary background. At this moment of history, we need to face in their globality the real issues, so that life will structure itself in such a way that legislation may spring forth from it.

6. The two ..... resolutions before the 3rd Commission in the light of "equality vs. protection."

The 3rd Commission has before it two resolutions which, while having relevancy, are nevertheless ambiguous. Both aim at equality for women -- the first by stressing the need for equality of opportunity within the United Nations and its agencies (E/RES/1676 (LII)), the second by proclaiming an International Women's Year (E/RES/1681(LII)), so to focus national and world attention on the problems still to be solved.

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Although aimed at equality, both resolutions could seem to reinforce "discrimination" in relation to women. Why is that so? In fact, we are facing here a very profound theoretical problem, namely the resolution of the antinomy

"equality/ protection"

or

"parity/differentiation".

In the last session of the Commission the delegate of United Kingdom observed that "a subject at present under discussion was the extent to which the Government should legislate to protect working women, especially as such legislation was seen by some as a form of discrimination". (E/CN.6/Min.,575, pg. 36). The delegate of Norway went further in this line saying that "special protective measures for women were to be avoided, since they would always be obstacles in the way of equality". (E/CN.6/Min.576, pg 51).

Further in the minutes we read that the delegate of Nigeria said that, "while she agreed with representatives who had emphasized the dangers of (...) insisting on the over-protection of women, she nevertheless wished to emphasize that women, particularly in under-developed countries like her own, were still in need of protection" (E/CN.6/Min.579, pg.78).

These examples are not meant to oppose different views but to illustrate that these two poles are present in every attempt to protect, to promote, and even "to discriminate" in favour of women.

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To face such problems we may need what has been called "preferential legislation," that is, legislation which deliberately wants, for a given period, to compensate the injustice done to a given group by adopting special measures for such a group. It is on the basis of this understanding that a draft-resolution promoting the access of more women to the United Nations system is totally acceptable to my delegation.

As to

As to resolution 1681 (LII) concerning the International Women's Year, if it is not to appear as mere token (apparently celebrating in one year what women and men haven't been able to achieve throughout history!), it does need a very clear formulation by the 3rd Committee.

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If one of the most significant qualitative goals of the International Development Strategy for this decade was the encouragement of "full integration of women in the total development effort", the proclamation of such a year should primarily aim at appraising targets, methods and means used to reach them by the mid-decade.

In order to come to grips with these questions, I am not suggesting another enquiry on a world scale, but rather a deliberate shift from the juridical and even the strictly developmental approach to the cultural one, that is to an approach where women's actions in society may evolve from their way of being, where the collective effort will be mainly in terms of "cultural policy", conceived in the way UNESCO has developed it

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in the last 4 years. My suggestion means that it is not even the "full integration of women in development" that is key to the future but that women can be pioneers in seeing the evolution of the society in which they live in terms of an evolving cultural policy and contributing decisively to its shaping.

On a practical level, my delegation would like to suggest that the 3rd Committee will help to give already now content to the draft-resolution on the International Women's Year, by proffiting from the cross-section present in the committee. Concretely, I suggest that an ad-hoc working-group of delegates, representatives of the specialized agencies and NGO's representatives may be constituted during this session to formulate suggestions for the Secretariat as to the way in which the year 75 can be celebrated.

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On a less practical level, I would like to express a personal hope: that the contribution of women in society may become less hampered by prejudices, images, roles and that together with men they may be able to build society in a new way where justice and peace will go hand-in-hand. Then, perhaps several years from now, young men and women collaborating as full human beings in all spheres of society, will look at our generation and will say:

"Look what they did with their land...

And who did it ?

Men and women like us - average height

orbiting carefully into tomorrow

each wave of space singing the future"... (1)