

of the Commission on the Status of Women

- intervenção

- in "Third Committee"

- on "Report of the Economic and
Social Council"

- ONU, New York

13 nov 1972

MARIA DE LOURDES PINTASILGO

PRIMEIRO MINISTRO

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro



UNITED NATIONS
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THIRD COMMITTEE

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AND FORTY-FOURTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 8 November 1972, at 11.15 a.m.

Chairman:

Mr. GIAMBRUNO

Uruguay

Rapporteur:

Mrs. IDER

Mongolia

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Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

Report of the Economic and Social Council (continued)

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REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (A/8703, chapter XII, section H, chapter XIV, sections A and B, chapters XV, XVII, XVIII and XIX; draft resolutions 1676 (LII) and 1681 (LII) (continued))

The CHAIRMAN transmitted to the United States delegation the good wishes of the members of the Committee for the recovery of Mrs. Shirley Temple Black, who in the past had represented the United States on the Third Committee.

Mr. STILLMAN (United States of America) thanked the members for their concern for Mrs. Black's health, and said on her behalf that one of the outstanding events in her life had been her participation in the work of the Third Committee during the twenty-fourth session of the General Assembly. Mrs. Black was a great believer in the United Nations and its work, and was profoundly appreciative of the friendships she had made through her work in the Organization; he was sure that she would be greatly moved by the expression of sympathy from the Committee. Fortunately, the report from her doctors was very satisfactory and the prognosis indicated full recovery.

Miss PINTASILGO (Portugal) said she would like to refer in particular to chapter XIV, section A of the report of the Economic and Social Council (A/8703) concerning the report of the Commission on the Status of Women. She did so primarily because the twenty-fourth session of the Commission was the first to have been held since the Council decided that it should meet every two years, and secondly because the General Assembly was the only forum to which her Government had access for making observations on the question.

Since the mid-1960s, both inside and outside the United Nations, a profound shift had been taking place in regard to the situation of women in society. Abandoning their individual role, women had emerged as a social group with a unity of purpose and interests and an awareness of being a sector of mankind that was underprivileged, discriminated against and oppressed. That was a sociological phenomenon of international dimensions, whose political significance could not be overlooked. In the view of most sociologists, the new awareness on the part of women of their role in society was linked with the other movements which had sprung up since the beginning of the industrialization era, and it could provide Governments with a new insight into the relationship between the status of women and the key structures and value systems of a given society. It was therefore

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(Miss Pintasilgo, Portugal)

astonishing to find that the Commission on the Status of Women had not taken note of the significance of that movement or of the importance of the sociological phenomenon it involved.

Today, women were effectively influencing the life of their communities and were able to question their values and introduce new challenges. In the past the woman's role had been conceived as the stabilizing element, but today it could be said that women were instrumental in social change. As the representative of the World Federation of Trade Unions had pointed out at the last session of the Commission on the Status of Women, there was a close link between the elimination of discrimination against women and the achievement of better living and working conditions for all workers (E/CN.6/MIN.578). Today the problems were more and more complex, but women could be a decisive factor in building up a new society and a world more fit to live in. Her concern in stressing the force of women in social change came from the fact that the Economic and Social Council's report scarcely conveyed the scope and the depth of the work consistently done by the Commission on the Status of Women or the persevering, goal-oriented support it received from the Secretariat.

It was remarkable how many countries, regardless of their level of industrialization or their economic régime, had set up national commissions concerned in one way or another with the status of women. In Portugal, the climate of common interests and aspirations among women had led to preparatory work for the constitution of a national commission on the participation of women in social and economic life, although several national branches of non-governmental organizations had been dealing with that matter for a long time.

The framework of reference of the Commission on the Status of Women had obviously undergone a shift from its original concept. The political rights of women had been in the forefront of the Commission's concern in its first 10 or 15 years, which might be called a juridical or legalistic phase. During the 1960s, the admission of a large number of countries embodying new traditions and customs, and the launching of the First United Nations Development Decade, had drawn the world's attention to the contribution that women could make to the global development of their countries. There had been a changeover from the basic right to vote to the political concept of full participation, from a phase of individualistic and

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(Miss Pintasilgo, Portugal)

feminism to one of active, community-oriented involvement. That change had been reflected in the work of the United Nations relating to the status of women, and the emphasis had shifted from the recognition of rights to the promotion of the full and effective participation of women in all sectors of national and international life. The concept of participation implied that full citizenship had not only a civic dimension but a social, economic and cultural one as well. A new way of structuring society was at stake, involving full responsibility in the social, economic and cultural life of the community, with the corresponding authority and opportunity for decision-making at all levels. Those questions were at the root of the recurring concern, expressed in resolutions adopted by the General Assembly in the past and in Economic and Social Council draft resolution 1676 (LII), that women should occupy positions of every category in the United Nations system, "particularly at the policy-making level".

That concern gave stronger weight in turn to the concept of full participation, so that a third phase of the evolution of the Commission might even be dawning in which women were no longer the object of society's concern but were the subject of their own lives, with responsibility for shaping the world, the ability to make history, and the will to create culture. That phase was strongly cultural, and mechanisms must be found in it to help women to rediscover who they were and to make their own contribution to society as full human beings, well aware at once of their common destiny with men and of their different "way of being" in the world. In that context, her delegation had examined with great interest resolution I (XXIV) of the Commission, on the influence of mass communication media on the formation of a new attitude towards the role of women in present date society. It was important that women should realize how much the mass media reinforced the status quo of a society ruled by males. The Portuguese delegation hoped that the implementation of that draft resolution would open the way for all women to be given the chance to analyse the truth of their roles and to decide more critically what part they wanted to play in society.

Turning to the programme of work of the Commission on the Status of Women, she welcomed the fact that in that field the United Nations was adopting a systematic approach which revealed the growing rationalization of the work of the Commission. But that rationalization needed to go a step further, in view of the

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(Miss Pintasilgo, Portugal)

interdisciplinary and intersectoral dimensions of the questions related to the status of women. In fact, the programme of work seemed rather to recapitulate the process undergone by the Commission, with the juridical phase, the development-oriented phase and a glimpse of the cultural phase.

With regard to the legislation aspect, Council resolution 1677 (LII) analysed legislation aimed at the elimination of discrimination against women in regard both to political and civil rights and to social, economic and cultural rights, and appraised the discrepancies between law and practice. It was to be hoped that the work done by the Commission in that sphere would reveal the stumbling-blocks preventing practice from going hand in hand with law. In that respect, Portugal fully supported the Commission's studies on the status of women in private law and on the status of women and family planning. Her delegation did not endorse the proposal for a new instrument or instruments of international law to eliminate discrimination against women (resolution 5 (XXIV) of the Commission). It had serious doubts as to the technical feasibility and operational character of a single instrument which would deal with all the rights relevant to the status of women, although it could not overlook the contribution already made in that direction by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "Study of provisions in existing conventions that relate to the status of women" (E/CN.6/552). The report could be used by Member States as a guideline for making a comparative analysis of international declarations, conventions, etc. and national legislation, and for evaluation of the existing international conventions, some of which were obsolete.

The second phase in the evolution of the Commission was clearly shown in projects 2 and 3 of its programme of work, respectively entitled "Programme of concerted international action to promote the advancement of women and to increase their contribution to development" and "The role of women in community and national life". The report of the Economic and Social Council incorporated in one item the five draft resolutions submitted to it by the Commission in connexion with the further implementation of the programme of concerted international action; those draft resolutions covered a wide range of key questions concerning women and development. It was undeniably in the sphere of development that women had the most vital part to play. In the search for a global concept of

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(Miss Pintasilgo, Portugal)

development that would encompass both the industrialized and the non-industrialized segments of society, it might be incumbent on women of all countries to help change the existing 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 provided.

The problem of the status of women needed a more existential approach. If women were to participate fully in economic life they must be given equal pay for equal work. The issue was so urgent that the wisdom of according it only category B priority must be questioned. The same thing applied to the study of the conditions and measures needed to enable women to combine work, family and civic responsibilities, which had also been relegated to category B in spite of its paramount importance. If she thus questioned the order of priorities selected, it was because she believed that in future the Commission should adopt a more existential approach, treating juridical matters only as necessary background and tackling the real issues in their globality so that legislation could spring forth from the structure of life itself.

Economic and Social Council resolutions 1676 (LII) and 1681 (LII) were relevant but ambiguous. Although both sought to promote equality, they might appear to reinforce discrimination in relation to women. That was because efforts to protect women and advance their status invariably came up against the antinomy "equality/protection", or "parity/differentiation". To overcome that difficulty, it might be necessary to adopt a type of preferential legislation in which, for a stated period, special measures would deliberately be applied in favour of a given group to compensate it for the injustice which it had previously suffered. It was on the basis of that understanding that the idea of a draft resolution promoting the access of more women to the United Nations was perfectly acceptable to her delegation.

Resolution 1681 (LII) concerning International Women's Year clearly needed to be reformulated more clearly by the Third Committee. If one of the most significant qualitative goals of the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Decade was "the encouragement of the full integration of

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(Miss Pintasilgo, Portugal)

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(Mr. Akyamac, Turkey)

It was several years since Turkey had been a member of the Commission on the Status of Women, but it had continued to follow the work of that body very closely and had supported measures to improve the status of women both within and outside the United Nations, for it fully shared the view that real social development could be achieved only with the equal participation of women in all aspects of human activity. In that connexion, he wished to mention an important seminar on the status of women and family planning held in Turkey from 11 to 24 July 1972 under the auspices of the programme of advisory services in the field of human rights and with the co-operation of the Turkish Government. The meeting had been attended by representatives of 28 countries and of various specialized agencies and governmental and non-governmental organizations, who had had the opportunity to give detailed consideration to the effects of family planning on the status of women. The seminar had presented to Governments, the United Nations and other national and international organizations conclusions and recommendations which his delegation considered worth the attention of the Commission on the Status of Women. He, therefore, asked the Secretariat to transmit the summary records of the report of the seminar to the Commission at its next session so that it could adopt whatever measures it considered advisable.

Mr. BELTRAN (Uruguay) recalled that both by tradition and by law Uruguay was opposed to capital punishment. Seventy-five years before, it had abolished capital punishment in Uruguay and since then nobody had pressed for its reintroduction. Therefore in all the legislation that had been drafted subsequently to the abolition, there had been an unequivocal reaffirmation of protection for the most fundamental right, the right to life. The recognition of that right was a basic principle of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and if it was not respected no other human rights could be enjoyed, for if it was ignored, there was no remedy, whereas if other rights were lost, they could be recovered, at least in their essentials.

Furthermore, despite the fact that for the reasons given in the report of the Economic and Social Council there was not enough information either in extent or in depth on the application of capital punishment, he was convinced that it was applied more often where pressing political reasons were invoked. The Uruguayan

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(Mr. Beltran, Uruguay)

delegation understood the problems of other countries and knew that it was difficult to change systems, practices and traditions overnight; but it also believed that the international community could not remain indifferent to practices which violated the right to life. In that connexion, it was encouraging to note that the United Nations itself had already understood that fact when, in 1959, it had asked the Economic and Social Council to initiate a study of the question of capital punishment and of the effects of capital punishment and the abolition thereof on the rate of criminality. Nevertheless, although the item had been on the Organization's agenda almost constantly, years had gone by without even the necessary information being obtained. In such circumstances, the Uruguayan delegation was co-sponsoring a draft resolution which aimed at emphasizing the importance of that item.

Lastly, he was happy to note that in several countries the death penalty had recently been either abolished or reduced.

Mr. SAYAR (Iran) said that although he did not deny the importance of any of the chapters of the report of the Economic and Social Council that were before the Commission, he wished to speak only of the work of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Iran, which had been a member of that Commission for some time, had made great efforts towards the emancipation of women during the last decade. Various laws had been adopted granting them political, economic and social rights and to strengthen those they had already acquired, and nowadays the presence of women was felt at all levels of Iranian society. In addition, under a recent law, young women graduates were recruited on the same terms as men to serve in what were known as "the armies of knowledge, rural development and health" in which they performed the equivalent of military service. The young recruits were sent to remote villages to help the rural population by teaching them the elements of hygiene, new agricultural methods, etc. Another law which had been adopted ensured equal rights for both spouses. In future, divorce would have to be authorized by a court in accordance with the law. Furthermore, the Iranian Labour Code, which was in harmony with the various ILO conventions and recommendations, prohibited discrimination based on sex and further stipulated that women were entitled to the same pay as men for equal work.

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(Mr. Sayar, Iran)

As to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women, it had achieved significant progress at its twenty-fourth session. For his part, he supported the Commission's recommendation regarding the preparation of a new instrument of international law to promote the equality of women. Also, he attached great importance to the study of the function of women in society and particularly to the status of rural women. In that connexion, he said that the Iranian Government considered that the part played by women in development programmes, particularly in developing countries, should steadily increase. Another question that was equally important for the developing countries was that of family planning, which should receive particular attention from the Commission.

For all those reasons, he supported the two draft resolutions submitted to the Third Committee on that point and expressed the hope that they would be adopted unanimously.

Mrs. BARISH (Costa Rica) said that her delegation was particularly interested in the resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council on the report of the Commission on the Status of Women. In that connexion, she mentioned resolution 1677 (LII) on the implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which was of special importance because, although the Declaration had been adopted several years before, there were still differences between the legal and the de facto status of women. The Declaration should therefore be given the greatest possible publicity. Referring to resolution 1679 (LII) on the status of the unmarried mother, she recalled that at the beginning of the year a symposium had been held in Costa Rica on the education of women which had recommended that special protection should be extended to the unmarried mother and her child.

She also attached considerable importance to resolution 1686 (LII), on the activities of UNESCO of special interest to women. Education was of vital importance in the development of women in all fields, particularly in the eradication of the myths and prejudices which had unquestionably retarded their progress; it would therefore be advisable to encourage UNESCO to continue its fruitful work. As to resolution 1681 (LII), on International Women's Year, she felt that a celebration of that kind would most certainly emphasize the achievements of the United Nations in that field during the 25 years of its existence. She

(Mrs. Barish, Costa Rica)

recalled that 1975 would be the end of the first five years of the Second United Nations Development Decade, which included among its aims and objectives the involvement of women in development efforts. Paragraph 4 of that resolution requested the Secretary-General to prepare within the limits of the existing resources a draft programme for the Year and to submit the programme to the Committee on the Status of Women at its twenty-fifth session. The Costa Rican delegation had supported that draft resolution in the Commission on the Status of Women and it now hoped that there were enough "existing resources" for the programme to be drafted successfully. For all those reasons, she trusted that the Third Committee would endorse that resolution.

Turning to chapter XII, section H, of the report of the Economic and Social Council, on the work that had been done with regard to capital punishment, she said it was essential to reduce the number of offences for which the death penalty might be inflicted since nothing had proved that it had any real effect as a deterrent to crime. As progress was made with studies and new systems were developed for the treatment of delinquents, the trend towards the abolition of capital punishment was becoming perceptibly stronger. As to the information which the Secretary-General had been requested to collect under resolution 2857 (XXVI), of which the Costa Rican delegation had been a sponsor, as it had been of the previous draft resolutions on the same subject, it was encouraging to note that a considerable number of reports had already been received so that it was now possible to make a more complete study of the problem. Costa Rica had not sent any information to the Secretary-General because it had abolished capital punishment in 1895. Nevertheless, the Costa Rican Government was continuing its attempts to modernize and improve the penal system, placing emphasis on the rehabilitation of the delinquent. For that reason the Costa Rican delegation would welcome any initiative aiming at the abolition of capital punishment.

Mrs. FATOUDIARRA (Guinea) noted that although it was 27 years since the United Nations had been established, it was only now that a woman was finally holding high office in the Organization. Therefore, she suggested that during the seminars to be held on the occasion of International Women's Year special attention should be paid to programmes aimed at increasing the number of professional women.

(Mrs. Fatoudiarra, Guinea)

In Guinea women fortunately were not subject to discrimination; they participated actively in all aspects of the advancement of society and had access to employment of all kinds. The organization of women and their access to education had enabled them to participate, with full awareness of their role, in the process of their country's development. Moreover, both Guinean legislation in general and the Labour Code in particular included provisions guaranteeing women equal rights with men. In Guinea, marriage was subject to the freely expressed consent of the wife. For all those reasons, and despite the fact that in Guinea the problem which the Committee now had before it did not exist, her delegation would support the two draft resolutions under consideration and it hoped that they would be adopted.

Mrs. LAFONTANT (United States of America) said that the efforts of American women to win for themselves an equal place in society were well known. Probably the most crucial areas of government action along those lines had been education, employment and participation in politics. As far as education was concerned, co-education in the public schools was standard policy and free education was offered during the first 12 years. At the university level, there was also a trend toward co-education. At the present time more than 40 per cent of the bachelor's degrees awarded by universities were earned by women. Unfortunately the proportion of women who pursued post-graduate studies was much smaller and, in fact, in the past 20 years the number of doctoral degrees awarded to women had decreased, which showed that the erroneous idea that women needed less education than men still persisted. Efforts were also being made to provide more opportunities for women who had interrupted their education to marry and have children and now wished to resume their studies; the number of institutions catering for women who found themselves in that situation was constantly increasing.

In the United States the Government was also striving to ensure that women had equal employment opportunities and to guarantee them equal pay for equal work. As a result, the number of women holding high-level posts in the Federal Government had greatly increased and that advance not only had improved the status of women but also had been most beneficial to the country's national development. Partly as a result of those efforts, the entire composition of the work force had changed: today women accounted for 40 per cent of the work force in the United States, and

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(Mrs. Lafontant, United States)

while the average earnings of women were still lower than those of men in similar occupations, that difference in part reflected the greater proportion of women who worked part-time.

Women had equal political rights with men, but there continued to be a lower proportion of women in public life. That was due in part to the discrimination from which women had previously suffered, not only in education but also in employment. Few women possessed the practical experience in administrative and executive activities necessary to enable them to hold public office. That realization had given added urgency to efforts to equalize educational and employment opportunities for women. In any case, there was no doubt that progress was being made in that area: for example, the nation's two major political parties considered it essential that more women should participate in the conventions that selected their presidential candidates. Thus it could be said that women had entered into the mainstream of American politics.

Among the many activities of the United Nations relating to the status of women she wished to draw attention to those aimed at facilitating family planning. Women should have the right to decide voluntarily how many children they wished to have and when they were going to have them. The efforts of the United Nations and in particular those of the Secretary-General to increase the number of women in high-level posts in the United Nations also had the support of the United States. It was gratifying to see a positive trend in that direction; on the other hand, the number of women members of the Main Committees of the General Assembly was still, as everyone could see, very small, the Third Committee being the one with the largest number of women representatives. Perhaps that was because even in the United Nations the myths and stereotypes which had limited women to welfare and humanitarian issues persisted.

Mr. SAARIO (Finland) said that his delegation attached great importance to the question of the status of the unmarried mother and her child, for it held the conviction that a non-discriminatory status must be guaranteed for the child regardless of the legal relationship existing between the parents. It had therefore consistently emphasized that a family consisting of an unmarried mother and her child should be recognized as one form of family. It accordingly welcomed the inclusion of that concept in Economic and Social Council resolution 1679 (LII).

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(Mr. Saario, Finland)

Another item to which his delegation attached great importance was the participation of women in development. The resolutions contained in the report of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/5109) reflected a justified concern over that matter. The International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade likewise spelled out the role to be played by women in that process.

One aspect of the question of inequality between men and women was that of the employment of women in professional posts in the United Nations Secretariat. The decreasing proportion of women in such posts was alarming in that it reflected more generally the possibilities open to women in Member countries of holding professional posts.

With regard to Economic and Social Council resolution 1681 (LII) he recalled that his delegation had been one of those among which the idea of holding an International Women's Year had originated. Despite the existing scepticism concerning the proclamation of international years, the question of the promotion of equality between men and women warranted the adoption of such a measure. His delegation's support for that idea was based on two fundamental considerations. Firstly, as the Second United Nations Development Decade advanced more emphasis was being placed on the distribution of the benefits of development and instead of making assessments on the basis of over-all averages it was necessary to think in terms of groups of people and their equal right to share those benefits. Women formed a group which in many cases had been in an obviously under-privileged position. Moreover, the proclamation of an International Women's Year would be especially timely because of the growing concern aroused by the population problem. The measures taken in that field would influence first of all the role of women in many societies. Perhaps, however, the name "International Women's Year" was not satisfactory, for the core of the problem was the promotion of equality between the sexes, which was not the same as promoting the role of one sex. In conclusion, he said that his delegation wished to encourage the Secretariat to prepare a very concise and realistic programme for the Year which would provide an appropriate basis for national authorities and the non-governmental organizations in furthering that cause.

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Mrs. MARICO (Mali) said that she would like to explain her vote on the draft texts in Economic and Social Council resolutions 1676 (LII) and 1681 (LII) before the votes were taken.

The CHAIRMAN said that he had taken note of the request of the representative of Mali, who would be invited to speak before the voting. He then reminded the Committee that there would be no meeting in the afternoon of the following day and he suggested that the list of speakers on the item should be closed at the end of the morning meeting.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro