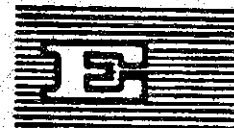


# UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL



54012

Distr.  
LIMITED



E/CN.14/SW/INF.9  
14 March 1969

Original : ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA  
Regional Meeting on the Role of Women  
in National Development  
Addis Ababa, 17-26 March 1969

Statement by the Chief of the Section on the Status of Women,  
Division of Human Rights, United Nations

It gives me great pleasure to express our sincere interest in the UNECA regional meeting on the role of women in national development currently taking place in Addis Ababa and to wish you every success in your deliberations.

The topic of this regional meeting is one in which the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has shown considerable interest, especially in recent years, and the draft agenda contains a number of items which the Commission has itself considered on various occasions. I would mention in particular the following: the contribution of women to public life; civic and political status of women; and education, training and employment opportunities, in addition to the items of a more general character.

Established by the Economic and Social Council in 1946 the Commission on the Status of Women presently consists of representatives from thirty-two countries, six of them from Africa. At its 1969 session, which concluded recently in New York, the six African members were from Botswana, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Madagascar, Morocco, Tunisia and the United Arab Republic. Its mandate is to prepare recommendations and reports to the Council "on promoting women's rights in the political, economic, civil, social and educational fields", and to make recommendations "on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights, with the object of implementing the principle that men and women shall have equal rights".

Much of its work has been aimed at setting international standards and at encouraging their application at the national level, and this remains a very important feature of its programme. It seeks to achieve its aim in

this respect through research and study, leading to the elaboration of international conventions and declarations, and to the adoption of numerous resolutions addressing recommendations to governments covering all the fields mentioned in its terms of reference.

Among the United Nations conventions that have been adopted on the recommendation of this Commission are: the Convention on Political Rights of Women of 1952, the Convention of the Nationality of Married Women of 1957 and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages of 1962 and the Recommendation on the same subject of 1965.

The most recent achievement of this nature was the adoption in November 1967 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against women. The Declaration, which contains articles on political rights, nationality, private law, penal law, traffic in women, education, and economic and social rights, is the first single international instrument setting standards in all the above fields, which have long been the concern of the Commission on the Status of Women. Governments of States Members of the United Nations have been invited to submit to the Commission each year reports on the publicity they have given to the Declaration and on the measures they have taken to implement its provisions. The implementation of this Declaration therefore is now under annual consideration by the United Nations. The implementation of the other conventions and recommendations is also subject to periodic review.

Side by side with the setting of standards, the Commission, especially over the last few years, has been seeking further ways of advancing the status of women and to this effect has been trying to establish a long-term programme for their advancement. An important objective of this programme - although not its only one - is to try and increase the use of technical assistance available through the United Nations and its various agencies to benefit women.

With a view to establishing guidelines for such a programme the Commission recently asked the Secretary-General to prepare and send to Governments and non-governmental organizations, a questionnaire seeking their view on the role of women in national development, on the degree of priority which should be given to the contribution of women to the various areas of development, on the problems encountered, on possible ways of surmounting these, and on the kind of assistance that might be required.

Sixty-five Governments have answered the questionnaire to date, sixteen of them from Africa. 1/ Many Governments from all regions of the world

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1/ Botswana, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, United Arab Republic, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

indicated that, while the participation of women was increasing considerably in many areas, their level of responsibility was generally low, and that women tended to play a minor role in the preparation of national development plans and in policy making. Several also observed that women as a source of manpower were becoming increasingly important, and that their role in agriculture in a number of countries was recognized as significant. Among the problems to be overcome specific mention was made of: inadequate training and education; lack of day-care centres and similar facilities; attitudes of men towards women and of women towards themselves; problems of working women with family responsibilities; and lack of organization and leadership among women. A need for assistance was seen in particular in training in all fields, seminars and other types of regional meetings, carrying out of surveys, the award of fellowships and the provision of experts. The value of United Nations studies and research and of the elaboration of international instruments was also stressed in several replies.

As a next step in establishing a long-term United Nations programme for women the Commission, among other recommendations, has asked the Secretary-General in consultation with the specialized agencies concerned and UNICEF and in co-operation with the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions, to prepare a five-year programme of concerted action for the advancement of women within the framework of technical co-operation programmes, including the programme of advisory services in the field of human rights. This five-year programme is to be submitted to it if possible in 1970.

Any recommendations adopted by this regional meeting therefore which may throw further light on the particular needs of African women and on the priorities as you see them would be most helpful to us in drawing up this five-year action programme.

I wish at this point to endorse what has been said by the representative of the Social Development Division about the education and training of women in all fields. We share their concern to develop and expand the assistance available in this field. Since my colleagues will give you further details, as required, about other technical co-operation programmes, I shall confine my brief remarks to the help available for women under the advisory services programme in the field of human rights.

This programme, established by resolution of the General Assembly in 1956, covers all aspects of human rights, including the status of women. Under it the Secretary-General is authorized to furnish Governments which request them services primarily in the form of experts, fellowships and seminars. With present resources some or all of the following may be possible: one or perhaps two seminars a year on topics relating to the status of women, the award of a certain number of fellowships in this field, or perhaps the organization of a group fellowship project or a training course; and the provision of a small number of experts to advise Governments on matters relating to the status of women.

The main emphasis under the human rights advisory services programme since its initiation in 1956 has been on the organization of seminars and, to a somewhat lesser extent, on fellowships, which have been awarded both to individuals and to groups of individuals nominated as candidates by their Governments. Few requests for the services of experts have been received.

Within the last few months, however, an expert was sent to the Cameroon to help in the advancement of the status of women in economic and social fields and in the increased participation of women in community development programmes. This is a useful example of what can be requested.

Fellowships have been awarded in the last year to African women from Burundi, Ghana and Morocco to study such topics as: equal employment opportunities for women; participation of women in civic and political education with special emphasis on the role of women's organizations at the national and local levels; equality of recruitment and conditions of employment for women in the civil service and in State-owned corporations.

As regards seminars, three have been held in Africa on topics directly related to the status of women: the first on the participation of women in public life which was held in 1960 in Addis Ababa at the request of the Government of Ethiopia, the second on the status of women in family law organized in 1964 in Lomé at the request of the Government of Togo and the third and most recent seminar on civic and political education of women took place in Accra in November in 1968 at the request of the Government of Ghana.

The main purpose of human rights seminars is to bring together key people within a region to exchange ideas and to share their knowledge and experience, especially of common problems and of ways of dealing with these which may be of mutual benefit in finding solutions for them. The conclusions and recommendations are submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women which may take appropriate action at the international level.

It should be remembered that the programme of advisory services in the field of human rights - and other technical co-operation programmes - is intended primarily to assist Governments and all services rendered are based on government requests. As has been pointed out on previous occasions "the authorities often have to make a heart-rending choice between the various projects for which they desire assistance. In the ensuing competition, activities of interest to women are often the losers".

The human rights programme is somewhat independent of other technical co-operation programmes in certain respects and is not subject to the same system of priorities and programming. It is, moreover, the only one which deals expressly with projects relating to the status of women, although its resources are limited.

To conclude what I have said in this brief statement, United Nations activities to advance the status of women currently follow two main and closely related trends; the elimination of discrimination against women, wherever it exists, and the promotion and encouragement of programmes aimed at increasing the contribution of women to national development, whether at the level of family, community, national or international life. These objectives are summed up in the following three paragraphs of the preamble to the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women:

"Considering that discrimination against women is incompatible with human dignity and with the welfare of the family and of society, prevents their participation, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries and is an obstacle to the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity,

Bearing in mind the great contribution made by women to social, political, economic and cultural life and the part they play in the family and particularly in the rearing of children,

Convinced that the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women as well as men in all fields,"

In quoting these I would remind you that this Declaration was adopted by a unanimous vote, not only of the Commission on the Status of Women, but of the General Assembly of the United Nations, representing all its membership.

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