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REGIONAL OFFICER, AT THE ECA REGIONAL MEETING ON THE ROLE
OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Your Highnesses,
Madame Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

May I first of all convey to you, Madame Chairman, and to all participants at this meeting the very best wishes of the Director-General of the ILO for the achievement of results from your deliberations that will contribute to real progress in the drive for improved training for women and better utilisation of their knowledge and skill in national and intra-African development efforts.

True to the spirit and objectives which inspired the organization from its origin, ILO has always laid special emphasis on the need and on efforts for effective development and better use of available human resources and on improving working conditions, widening employment opportunities, improving vocational qualifications and productive efficiency. Its training and employment-stimulating activities cover the needs of men, women and youth. It is only through training and the achievement of full productive employment that the vast human resources of Africa can be tapped, a situation created for built-in capability for originality in self-development and a solid foundation established for the economic and social progress of the continent.

I wish now to introduce formally, for your study and discussion, the ILO background paper entitled "The Employment and Vocational Preparation of Girls and Women in Africa". It is numbered ILO/W.1/1969. I do not intend to read this paper. I have listened to the very constructive contributions you have already been making in your deliberations and I believe that it is a better course to allow you to study this background document in depth yourselves. I shall therefore limit the introduction to a few observations.

First you will notice in the short introduction the assertion of the firm view, confirmed by recent studies, that it is essential to take girls and women more fully into account in planning a strategy of human resources related to the needs of economic and social development.

Having said this, we would ask ourselves what is the position of employment opportunities today in Africa? It is, in this regard, difficult to make statements of general applicability to all the African countries. However, it remains true that opportunities are increasing in proportion to greater possibilities for education and training. New openings are becoming available to women in industry, commerce and offices, also in positions which in the past tended to be held by men alone. Even so, in discussing employment opportunities, one must bear in mind that in spite of the rapid urbanization taking place in Africa, the bulk of the population is still engaged in subsistence agriculture and that the vast majority of the female population is in this sector. Moreover, the development plans of various African countries show that the possibilities of substantial labour absorption by the modern sector over the forthcoming

years are very limited. At page 2, the background paper provides some statistics in this regard and discusses the present position and trends in the employment of women.

The meeting would, no doubt, wish to give attention to fields in which opportunities for women might be developed. The paper before you discusses some problems confronted in the employment of women in African countries. While not minimising these difficulties, government sources suggest that areas for developing opportunities for women's employment should include those where their natural aptitudes can be more effectively utilised, for example, the textile, food and machine-made product industries. The role of salaried women could also be increased in commercial enterprises, in the fields of health, education and social work. Other possibilities are cited in the paper.

I shall now comment briefly on the education and training of women for employment. As already pointed out, the employment of women and girls depends to a large extent on their level of education and training. Therefore, to improve their chances of employment, they must enjoy full and equal opportunities in education and training. Both the ILO and UNESCO separately recommended this as a basic principle in 1962.

At page 9 the background paper, you will observe, discusses "Education at School", indicating that in spite of the great progress achieved in promoting the education of women, their enrolment is still far behind that of boys in most African countries. The main reasons for this lower enrolment are also mentioned as well as measures suggested for increasing the school attendance of girls.

The section of the paper which is devoted to "Vocational Education and Training" attempts to pin-point the trends in regard to the vocational training opportunities for girls in African countries. From the statistics provided, one is led to the obvious conclusion that the percentages of girls enrolled in technical and vocational education is very low in Africa. The difference between the opportunities for boys and those for girls is not only quantitative but as well qualitative.

What are the fields in which vocational training might be developed? A section of the paper discusses this question and various suggestions have been placed before you, to mention a few: co-operative education for women with little or no education whose favourite form of self-employment is marketing; various kinds of office work for which current demand is much higher than supply - typing and shorthand, secretarial work, office accounting, operation of machines, etc.; specific kinds of work in factories such as supervisory, welfare and training functions; journalism and broadcasting. You will also find a section dealing with rural training for progress and modernisation in rural areas. It stands out very boldly that in most African countries provisions for educating and training rural women are either non-existent or badly oriented.

Finally, Ladies and Gentlemen, we consider that it would interest you to know what the ILO has done and is doing on behalf of women. We have provided you with a brochure entitled "The ILO and Women". The activities of the ILO have evolved with economic and social situations, acting as motivating factors to change in the interest of women or building on changing situation to improve the position of women. Thus, whereas in the early years of 1919 the Organisation's activities were modestly designed to protect the health and welfare of women workers, in recent years the activities have been broadened and are specifically more directed to helping women to obtain better training, equal opportunities for employment and equal pay and treatment in employment.

The fundamental objectives of ILO activities are two-fold: to safeguard the health, maternity and motherhood functions of women and to promote practical equality of opportunity and treatment for women workers. Processes which the Organisation has followed in pursuit of these ends include the establishment of international instruments related to women's employment, the creation of a panel of consultants on the problems of women workers since 1959. Occasionally women's problems are examined at ILO conferences and seminars. An example of this is provided by another document before you, AFRIC/II.P.R12, which resulted from the deliberations of the Second African Regional Conference held in this city in 1964. The needs of women will also be given adequate attention within the ILO job and skills programme for Africa which is at present under elaboration. In the final paragraphs of the background paper you will find some examples of ILO technical co-operation activities in Africa from which vocational training benefits accrue to women and girls.

On the occasion of the 22nd Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, held at New York, this year, a resolution was adopted on the economic rights and opportunities for women. It recognised the importance of ILO efforts in the sphere of handicrafts and the increasing participation of women in developing countries in this sphere of activity, commended the action of the ILO in arranging a meeting of experts in India in November 1968 on the Role of Handicrafts in Developing Countries and expressed the hope that ILO would find it possible to organize regional seminars on the role of handicrafts in the developing economies of the countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia, in particular with a view to greater participation of women in the economic development of these States. The ILO is eager to follow up this resolution within the African region. It will welcome proposals for action-oriented research and for technical co-operation activities.

We hope that the analysis of the situation, the problems and the prospects which we have provided in this background paper and the information contained in the records of the Second African Regional Conference will help you to carry out your discussions in the light of fuller information and assist you to arrive at concerted recommendations

in regard to the education, training and employment of women, my colleague, Mr. Churchward, who is the ILO Regional Adviser in Vocational Training, and myself will be pleased to help you in this great task.

Thank you, Madame Chairman.