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Regional Meeting on the Role of Women  
in National Development  
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SPEECH BY THE TANZANIAN DELEGATION TO THE CONFERENCE ON  
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Madame President,

I would first like to express our gratitude to the Government and people of Ethiopia for the kind welcome and the hospitality they have given us since our arrival in their beautiful city. The hospitality, I am sure, help a great deal towards making our conference a success.

I would also like to congratulate you, Madame President, for your election to the chair. The confidence which has been placed in you will no doubt be rewarded by the diligence with which you will conduct our meeting for the next week and a half.

I cannot forget to express, on behalf of my delegation, our thanks to the German Foundation and the ECA who have made it possible for us to gather here to discuss this important aspect of our continent's desire for rapid development in all fields.

Madame President,

In Tanzania, after our attainment of independence and more so after the adoption by the masses of our country of the Arusha Declaration (of which I shall say a little more later) our emphasis has shifted from discussing national issues at the level of men or women to that of all Tanzanians irrespective of their sex. The party and the Government assisted by all national institutions have dedicated themselves to creating a classless society in which all citizens enjoy equal rights, privileges and accept equal responsibilities. In other words, Madame President, the role of women in the development of our nation is very much the same as that of all able-bodied people.

At the time of our independence in 1961, we realized that if our country was to make rapid progress, it was essential that women live on terms of full equality with men. In fact this had been realized from the very early days of our independence struggle when the party spelled out the rights of all citizens irrespective of their race or sex. National reconstruction was realized to be the task of every one and the party has consistently put weight behind the principle of equality so that in Tanzania women occupy important positions at all levels of leadership and labour. In the civil service and in other production institutions women are side by side with their male counterparts. It is especially noteworthy that we have in Tanzania women working in what were traditionally called "men's jobs" in industry and factories.

We have thus made progress in a number of fields but we realize that certain traditions and practices under colonialism are not easy to eradicate in a short period of time. We know that if women prepare themselves to take revolutionary tasks and to discard once and for all practices that tend to limit their scope for greater contribution to the building of the nation, we shall have won the debate of definitions of roles.

The challenge of women's organizations in our country is, as our President Mwalimu Julius Nyerere said recently, "to imbue the women in this country with a revolutionary spirit so as to build a healthy and dignified Nation".

Women's organizations, drawing support from the party, work closely with the Government in Adult Education programmes and have at all times responded with more enthusiasm than men. At these adult education classes various other things are taught to women and these include consultations on health and nutritional requirements for the family, new methods of increasing efficiency, running of co-operatives or small wayside inns and various other things.

The UWT, the Union of Tanzania Women, which is affiliated to the ruling party of TANU and AFRO/SHIRAZI has started child welfare centres where mothers can send their children to, while they themselves go to work or attend to other national self-help tasks.

Our party's policy of socialism and self-reliance as laid down in the Arusha Declaration has given the women of Tanzania even greater a role than ever before. On the basis that no man or class should be allowed to exploit another, women in Tanzania derive equal benefits from employment in all sectors at equal pay as their male workers. In other words the principle of equal pay for equal work has been reinforced by the alliance of workers and peasants on a non-discriminatory socialist principle.

The Arusha Declaration has also strengthened the position of women by calling on all people and the State itself to be self-reliant and not to expect that the major factor of development is external aid. The Arusha Declaration has also awakened and strengthened the spirit of both men and women to attain the national culture, e.g., the youth movements are carrying out the campaign of discouraging the wearing of mini-skirts, the changing of colour by using chemicals and the wearing of wigs.

The status of women is therefore not defined on a legal basis but on a principle which is strictly adhered to at all levels of national endeavour. In our national service scheme boys and girls learn to perform tasks together for mutual development and defense of the country. I should like to point out here that due to our proximity to territories which are still under colonial domination (Mozambique, Rhodesia, South Africa and Angola) and the danger that this poses to our own national security, women have joined the front line for defense, again with equal respect and responsibility as for the men.

To conclude, Madame Chairman, it is our hope that this meeting will discuss seriously what concrete contributions to the development of our countries women can make. We would more especially hope that this meeting will not waste its time discussing the perennial question of who rules in the house or whether men should cook and take care of family chores like women do. These issues, while being important, are in our opinion, matters that should come under each country's cultural peculiarities.

Our delegation will co-operate with you Madame Chairman and all other delegates here to make this meeting fruitful and we hope that the contacts we shall have here will form a basis for future co-operation and useful exchanges among ourselves based on our experiences at this important juncture of African development.

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