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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

- Eighteenth meeting of the African  
Regional Coordinating Committee  
for the Integration of Women in  
Development (ARCC)

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

24 - 26 April 1997

**REPORT TO ARCC ON THE MEETING OF  
THE FORTY FIRST SESSION OF THE  
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**10 - 21 March 1997, New York**

## INTRODUCTION

A mission to New York was undertaken from 10 - 21 March 1997. The objective of the mission was to participate in the annual meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The CSW held its Forty first Session in New York from 10 - 21 March to consider the implementation of four of the twelve critical areas identified in the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA). The four critical areas included: Women and the Environment; Women in Power and Decision-Making; Women and the Economy and Education and Training of Women. In addition to the four critical areas of the Platform for Action, the Commission on the Status of Women also reviewed mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the United Nations as well as emerging issues affecting the situation of women.

A Working Group on the Elaboration of a Draft Optional to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women met parallel with the Commission for the second consecutive year.

This year's meeting marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Commission's first Session which was held at Lake Success, New York, from 10 - 24 February 1947. Since its establishment, the Commission on the Status of Women has actively continued to monitor the situation of women worldwide and promoting equality between men and women. It makes recommendations on issues affecting women and suggests policy goals for UN member States. It has also provided a forum for NGOs to interact with the UN system, and each other.

The Commission has 45 members representing governments out of which 13 members represent African governments. The 1997 CSW membership from Africa include: Angola, Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Namibia, Swaziland, Togo and Tunisia.

## OPENING OF THE SESSION

The opening session included a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Commission. Attending the celebration session was the UN Secretary-General and other personalities. The Secretary-General gave a key note address and introduced all eminent women who have played key roles in promoting equality between men and women. These were women pioneers who participated in the first meeting of the Commission on the status of women including those who have served as Secretary-Generals to the World Conferences on Women (1975, 1980, 1985 and 1995). Several statements were also made by individuals representing eminent women, and others from the UN Secretariat.

Following the opening Session, the Commission proceeded with its agenda by election of the chairperson and other members of the Bureau. Countries elected to the Bureau included: Bahamas as Chairperson, Bulgaria, Norway and Tunisia as Vice Chairpersons and Thailand as Rapporteur. The Commission also adopted the session's agenda and approved its organization of work. Among the agenda items included:

- Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women:

(a) Review of mainstreaming in organizations of the United Nations System;

(b) Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men;

(c) Implementation of strategies, objectives and action in the critical areas of concern.

- Communications concerning the Status of women.

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, including the elaboration of a draft-optional protocol to the Convention;

- Provisional agenda for the forty-second session of the Commission; and

- Adoption of the report of the Commission on its forty-first session.

**SUMMARY OF ISSUES DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING**

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women**

In discussing this agenda item, half a day was devoted to statements by member States and UN agencies giving progress reports on what respective governments and organizations have done to implement the Platform for Action. Progress reports were presented giving reference to specific areas of concern identified both in the Regional and the Beijing Platforms for Action. Following country and other organizations, presentations, the Commission held panels comprised of representatives from government, experts, civil society and the UN System. Panel discussions identified, emerging issues, successful strategies, areas of continuing concern in each thematic area (the four selected areas of concern mentioned earlier), and postulated ways to move forward. Delegates then participated in dialogue session to reach consensus on "Agreed Conclusions" for each of the thematic area. Several documents had been prepared by the Secretariat and by each member of the Panel for each thematic area as reference materials during the discussions. The following paragraphs highlight the agreed conclusions reached under each thematic area:

(i) **Women and the environment**: The "Agreed Conclusions" on women and Environment are contained in document E/CN.6/1997// L.3 Rev.1. The conclusion include amongst others: in the five-year review and assessment of the results of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, moving beyond the concept of women as a major group, a major focus should be the mainstreaming of a gender

perspective into the development and implementation of all legislation, policies and programmes with a view to achieving gender equality; the Commission on Sustainable Development should mainstream a gender perspective into its future work, ensuring that differential impacts on women and men of policies and programmes for sustainable development are well and effectively understood; all responsible actors should support the active participation of women on an equal footing with men in sustainable development at all levels, including participation in financial and technical decision-making through appropriate legislation and/or administrative regulations; political parties should be encouraged to incorporate environmental goals with a gender dimension into their party platforms; and that women should also be accorded full and equal rights to inheritance and other properties, land reform programmes should begin by acknowledging the equality of women's rights to land and take other measures to increase land availability to poor women and men.

**(ii) Women in power and decision-making**

Critical area of concern G of the Platform for Action deals with women in power and decision-making. The "Agreed Conclusions" and discussions focussed on the need of governments, institutions, and NGOs to actively facilitate women's participation at all levels of power and decision-making, including programmes to encourage the participation of women at grassroots level, the use of quotas to ensure women's participation in formal political institutions and programmes to prepare "The Girl-Child" for participation in decision-making structures. They also encouraged the Secretary-General to appoint a woman to the proposed new position of a Deputy Secretary-General of the UN. Human Rights groups are also working to lobby for the appointment of a woman as High Commissioner for Human Rights. Suggestions of names should be forwarded to the Centre for Human Rights in Geneva. The Agreed Conclusions also included that government should establish gender balance in decision-making in administration and public appointments at all levels and in the judicial and diplomatic services by establishing specific time-bound targets; and that government should actively promote the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in politics and power structure through women's representation in decision-making, both in quantitative (critical mass of 30 per cent) and qualitative terms.

**(iii) Women and the economy**

Critical area of concern F of the Platform for Action deals with women and the economy. During the panel discussions and the interventions that followed, members of the Commission agreed amongst others the following conclusions (E/CN.8/1997/L.12/Rev.1): women's unpaid work is to be measured and valued; governments should ensure that women's rights particularly those living in poverty are promoted and implemented through equal access to economic resources, including land, property rights, inheritance rights/right to heritance, credit and traditional savings schemes such as women's bank and cooperatives;

micro-credit schemes should be supported and monitored in order to evaluate their efficiency in terms of their impact on increasing and sustaining women's productivity, income-earning capacity, and economic empowerment and well being; that gender-sensitive monitoring is crucial in enforcing the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. Comprehensive policy-making in this field should include:

- use of analytical tools
- effective legislation
- transparency of women's and men's wages
- changing the gender-based division of labour and the stereotyped choices of men and women, and
- effective guidance for employers.

It was also agreed amongst others that social partners, including labour unions, employers organizations and non-governmental organizations that take initiatives for the advancement of women and publicizing information on the companies that violate anti-discrimination laws should be encouraged.

#### (iv) Education and Training of women

The Global Platform for Action recognized the central role of education for the advancement of women and the numerous benefits yielded for development and the empowerment of women. Education and training are necessities for the full and equal participation of women at all levels of decision-making and in shaping the future of their communities. Education was a constitutional right in many countries, but the full enjoyment of this right remained restricted for many citizens in particular girls and women and that women still accounted the majority of the world's adult illiterates. Following the discussions on this thematic area, the Commission recommended amongst others the following:

- Governments and all other actors should make special efforts to achieve the benchmarks set in the platform for Action of universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 50 per cent of primary school-age children by the year 2000; close the gender gap in primary and secondary school education by the year 2005; provide universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015; and consider multilateral and bilateral assistance.

- Donor Governments should strive to meet the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for overall official development assistance as soon as possible.

- Integrated policy-making must highlight the interlinkage between education and training policies on the one hand, and labour market policies on the other hand with an emphasis on the employment and employability of women. In order to enhance the employability of women, basic education and vocational qualifications, in particular in the field of science and technology, are of great importance.

- Training for women entrepreneurs should be given priority and support services such as access to capital credit, savings mechanisms and micro financing should be made available to promote the creation of employment; and

- The recruitment, training, working conditions and the status of teachers in particular, of women teachers, must be improved, and gender sensitive training for teachers, teacher trainers, school administrators and planners must be developed. Positive action programmes should be stimulated in order to overcome the under representation of women in educational management.

In all, an analysis of the above conclusions reached gives an indication that further measures are need (in addition to those identified in the Beijing Platform for Action) to effectively implement the Platform and bring changes to the situation of women in these four critical areas of concern. Furthermore, during the panel discussions, it was clear that many governments have made efforts to meet their commitments and that national action plans for the implementation of the platforms have been prepared in most cases. Statements and interventions from member States also showed that attention was being given to the education and training of women; women in power and decision-making and women in the economy. The agreed conclusions on women in the economy for example reiterate the need to formulate and monitor structural adjustment policies within a gender framework and support women's participation in the economic sector.

The four critical areas of concern (except one on women and the environment) addressed during the 41st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women fall within the framework of the Centre's gender programme on "Fostering Women's Leadership Roles, Promoting the Economic Empowerment of Women in Africa and Women's Human and Legal Rights. In this connection, recommended actions by the CSW are of significant importance to the implementation of the Centre's gender programme. The work of the Centre in these critical areas will be enhanced by receiving information and best practices on these issues from member States, NGOs and other organizations dealing with gender and women related issues. The exchange of information and best practices will not only enhance ACW's work but will also provide information as bases for developing and designing indicators/tools to be used for measuring changes in the implementation of the Platforms for Action and their impact on women as beneficiaries of such changes.

#### **OPTIONAL PROTOCOL**

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the only UN Convention which relates specifically to protecting the human rights of women. 139 governments have ratified CEDAW. These governments are obliged to implement measures to protect women from discriminatory practices in political, social, economic and cultural spheres. In a parallel meeting to the

41st Session of CSW, government delegates met to discuss the drafting of an Optional Protocol to CEDAW, a mechanism by which governments can be held accountable by individual women for failure to implement the obligations of CEDAW. Adopting an Optional Protocol would bring CEDAW in line with other UN human rights instruments and would increase the effectiveness of CEDAW. As discussed during this parallel meeting to CSW, it was reported that the Protocol would contain both an inquiry procedure which would allow the Committee to investigate systematic abuses of states obligations to protect women from discrimination and an individual complaint procedure.

The adoption of an Optional Protocol is therefore necessary and important. ARCC members through their respective governments should lobby in order to support this move.

#### **REVIEW OF MAINSTREAMING IN ORGANIZATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM**

A report of the Secretary-General on progress achieved in the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and in mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system was presented by the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women and also the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on gender. She highlighted institutional requirements for mainstreaming a gender perspective, including policies, institutional cultures, incentive systems, operating procedures and gender training. She also briefly outlined steps taken in support of implementation of the Platform for Action by the Division including a number of initiatives undertaken by the Division and other UN agencies including regional commissions in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective. The CSW at its 41st Session noted that mainstreaming was a responsibility of the United Nations system as a whole and that all staff in all policy and programme areas and in decision-making should be made accountable.

On ECA part, arrangements for mainstreaming of gender equality goals into all ECA work programmes and activities are in the process. Gender is recognized as a cross-cutting theme, thus the overall responsibility for gender mainstreaming is recognized as an institutional responsibility of all staff with programme managers giving their active and demonstrable support. To this end, ECA has appointed gender focal points in the subregional Development Centres who will assist and facilitate the work of member States in their implementation process and coordinate work on gender mainstreaming. The African Centre for Women has been allocated two roles: acting as a catalyst in promoting the mainstreaming of gender in the programmes of the ECA; and as an implementor, monitoring the agreed upon plans and strategies for correcting the marginalization of women in the Commission are implemented.

The capacity to mainstream gender equality will be a basic requirement for all levels of staff at ECA. In this respect, training programmes for capacity building will be conducted in the course of the year.

## RESOLUTIONS

In addition to the "Agreed Conclusions", CSW also passed resolutions on the following issues:

- Release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned (E/CN.6/1997/L.5);
- Older women, human rights and development (E/CN.6/1997/L.6);
- Palestinian women (E/CN.6/1997/L.7);
- Violence against women migrant workers (E/CN.6/1997/L.10);
- Traffic in women and girls (E/CN.6/1997/L.11); and
- Resolution (E/CN.6/1997/L.14) calls on the UN to mainstream gender concerns into all areas of UN work. The resolution also recognizes that gender focal points are essential to the success of such a programme. It also calls on the UN High Commission for Human Rights to "ensure that the equal status of all human rights of all women and girl children are integrated in UN system-wide activities.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Forty First Session of the Commission on the Status of Women ended its deliberations on 21 March with a number of resolutions adopted. A tentative agenda for the 1998 Session was also agreed upon. Members were encouraged to carry on their commitments and obligations to the implementation of the Regional and Global Platforms for Action. A tentative schedule for consideration of implementation of the Strategic Objectives and action in the critical areas of concern was also discussed. The schedule containing critical areas of concern to be discussed at each of the coming sessions from 1998 to 2000 include:

- 1998 - Violence against women
  - Women and armed conflict
  - Human rights of women
  - The girl child
- 1999 - Women and Health
  - Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
  - Initiation of the comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action.
- 2000 - Comprehensive 5 year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action.

Before the year 2000 for the comprehensive 5 year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action, ECA intends to organize in 1999 the 6th Regional Conference to review and appraise the implementation of the Regional and Global Platforms for Action. This is a concrete activity in which ARCC members will be expected to assist and be involved in the overall review and appraisal and in the organization of the meeting.