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Addis Ababa, 17-21 November 1975

**REPORT ON THE WORLD CONFERENCE
OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR**

I. Origin and purpose

1. In response to General Assembly resolution 3010(XXVII) proclaiming the year 1975 as International Women's Year and to ECOSOC resolution 1851(LVI) calling upon the Secretary-General to convene an international conference in consultation with member States, specialized agencies and interested non-governmental organizations, the World Conference of International Women's Year was held in Mexico City from 19 June to 2 July 1975. The theme of the Year and of the Conference was "Equality, Development and Peace".
2. The objectives of the Conference, as per the above-cited ECOSOC resolution, were "to examine to what extent the organizations of the United Nations system have implemented the recommendations for the elimination of discrimination against women, made by the Commission on the Status of Women since its establishment, and to launch an international action programme including short-term and long-term measures aimed at achieving the integration of women as full and equal partners with men in the total development effort and eliminating discrimination on grounds of sex, and at achieving the widest involvement of women in strengthening international peace and eliminating racial discrimination".
3. Resolution 3276(XXIX) of the General Assembly requested the Conference to submit its proposals and recommendations to the Seventh Special Session of the General Assembly to be held in September 1975. The proposals and recommendations of the Conference are also scheduled to be considered at the thirtieth session of the General Assembly, in 1975.

II. ECA's preparation for and contribution to the Conference

4. Among the regional and interregional meetings and consultations held in 1974-1975 in preparation for the Conference was the Regional Seminar for Africa on the Integration of Women in Development, with Special Reference to Population Factors (Addis Ababa, June 1974). This Seminar succeeded in formulating an Africa's Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development, which proposed among its priorities the establishment by ECA of the African Training and Research Centre for

Women. 1/ The Centre's programme is designed to take training courses and other projects to all countries of the region, concentrating on such fields, as food and nutrition, small-scale industries, upgrading of wage-employed women, promotion of labour-saving village technology and integration of women in national development. A communication unit within the Centre will disseminate information and publish training materials, for development of skills and changing of attitudes towards women's role. The Centre will also organize and operate the African Women's Development Task Force.

5. Other activities undertaken by the secretariat in connexion with the Conference, included:

(a) The submission of two study papers on "Current trends and changes in the status and roles of women and men"; and on "Integration of Women in the Development process as equal partners with men" (relating to Conference agenda items 2 and 3);

(b) The publication of: Special issues of the Newsletter, African Women; an information pamphlet on the Centre entitled, A Path to Progress for African Women; a special poster captioned the Women of Africa; and a pictorial brochure: Women of Africa - Today and Tomorrow, describing the work and responsibility of women in the region and proposing specific action programme for women's integration and development;

(c) A report of the secretariat programme activities on behalf of women.

Note: The publications (in English and French) were distributed to Conference participants as well as to member States and national women's organizations.

6. Activities on the national level: A majority of countries in the region have undertaken special projects and programmes in observance of the International Women's Year. Most Heads of State have made proclamations, including practical actions to be undertaken at the national and local levels. In addition to the establishment of seven National Commissions or Councils on Women and Development, during the first half of 1975, others are planned to be set up in the course of this year. National women's organizations and governments have held seminars and training courses, from local through national levels. In some countries, policies for the promotion of women employed in the private sectors and in the civil service have been established and are being implemented. Review of legislations is being undertaken in a number of countries, to eliminate those which discriminate against women and enforce those which recognize any special needs of women and children. Research and action programmes are directed to women in rural areas, towards the upgrading of both their economic and their social tasks. Programmes for literacy and adult education, as well as plans for increased enrolment of girls in formal education, are being intensified.

7. On the publicity side, information programmes are being arranged through radio, TV, and the press; some pamphlets, films, posters, flags and commemorative stamps have been issued; and school competitions and festivals are being held. These and other activities of governments and women's organizations within the Africa region are being supported whenever possible by the ECA, through its Africa Training and Research Centre for Women.

1/ The Centre was established within the secretariat on 31 March 1975, in response to Commission resolution 269(XII), as a co-operative venture in close partnership with FAO and with the assistance of UNDP, UNICEF, ILO and a number of bilateral and voluntary agencies.

III. Participants

8. Representatives of 133 member States, including 37 from the Africa region, participated in the Conference. 98 non-governmental organizations, 6 liberation movements from the Africa region, and the OAU attended as observers. The regional economic commissions, including the ECA, were represented. 2/

IV. Opening of the Conference

9. The Conference was opened by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In his address, he observed that "the great problems, which afflict us now and which will confront us even more severely in the future unless we resolve them, are not capable of solution by individual nations, or even groups of nations... the problems of the role of women in society, food, population, the environment, human settlements, health and education are not single problems. Each is a component part of the complex system that dominates the lives of all of us..." He expressed the belief that the hidden discrimination which affected women was not so much evidenced in the law, as in the "deeply ingrained attitudes of society". The problems of society could only be resolved with the active involvement of women.

10. Addressing this first meeting, the President of Mexico emphasized that the purpose of the Conference was "to find methods and strategies which will enable (women) ... to be actively incorporated into the development process and participate in all the tasks which the attainment of world peace entails". It is "an indisputable fact" that women in all countries have participated on a minority basis - in no country is equal participation of men and women a reality. Throughout the years, women's virtues, unlike those of men, have been defined in terms of their abstentions, rather than their acts.

11. The President called upon the women in the developed countries to view the problems in a spirit of solidarity with women throughout the world, by seeing the situations of poverty in the rest of the world as an intrinsic part of their cause. The industrialized nations should be the "internal opponents of a system condemning the majority of nations to a precarious and marginal existence". He warned that, "if the status of women is to be improved, social transformations in both the internal and the international order will have to be carried out, but these transformations, in turn, require increasing participation by women in all fields of activity.... only a critical, radical effort will make possible the true liberation of women, that is, the liberation of humanity and the transformation of the world economic order".

2/ The ECA delegation also assisted the IWCY Tribune, an independent non-governmental forum which was held concurrently with the Conference in Mexico City. In addition, the ECA Consultant on Women's Programme acted as a resource person at the Seminar on Women and Development, sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAS) in conjunction with UNITAR and UNDP, also in Mexico City before the Conference.

12. The Secretary-General of the World Conference of the IYW welcomed all delegates to the first intergovernmental meeting where women form part of virtually every delegation. She stated that "it is high time to acknowledge that the denial of women's rights and opportunities is at the very root of our development problems and socio-economic ills... including illiteracy, malnutrition, mass poverty and unchecked rates of population growth. Women's problems should no longer be considered as separate from those of society, as had been the international custom".

13. At the first plenary meeting, the Conference elected by acclamation the Attorney-General of Mexico as President of the Conference. Addressing the session, he referred to the outstanding representation of governments as testifying to the importance of the subject of discussion, and looked to the United Nations bodies, as well as the NGO representatives at the Tribune, to assist the deliberations.

V. Agenda[†] and organization

14. The agenda adopted at the 2nd plenary session was as follows:

- (1) Opening of the Conference and election of the President. A paper of nine lines

- (2) Adoption of the rules of procedure

- (3) Adoption of the agenda

- (4) Establishment of committees and organization of work

- (5) Election of officers other than the President or adjutant in any agency unit

- (6) Credentials of representatives

- (7) The objectives and goals of IWY; present policies and programmes

- (9) the involvement of women in strengthening international peace and

- and eliminating racism, apartheid, racial discrimination, colonialism, and territories by force

- alien domination and acquisition of territories by force

- (9) Current trends and changes in the status and roles of women, and the obstacles to be overcome in the achievement of equal rights,

- opportunities and responsibilities, brought on by the need to analyze and

- (10) The integration of women in the development process as equal partners and

- with men

- (11) "World Plan of Action" to maintain peace and improve living conditions to be completed by 1975.

- (12) Adoption of the Report of the Conference.

15. The Conference decided that items 1-6, and item 12 should be discussed in plenary; item 7 and 8 should be considered jointly in plenary; item 11 was allocated to Committee I, and items 9 and 10 to Committee II.

16. The Conference elected 46 Vice-Presidents, including 11 from Africa. The Chairman of Committee I was Mme Jeanne Martin Cissé (Guinea).

VI. Plenary session

17. The Plenary was addressed by Her Excellency Mrs. Sirimao Bandaranaike, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, and His Excellency Mr. Olof Palme, Prime Minister of Sweden. Several Heads of State, including those of Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia and Guinea, sent messages. Representatives of 125 member States, and representatives of United Nations bodies, liberation movements, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations addressed the Plenary.

18. Some African country representatives spoke of the need to establish a new world economic order; while others emphasized the necessity of giving special attention to women's integration in development, both within countries, and on the regional and international levels. Attention was focused on the rural women whose tasks were said to be often over-burdensome and underproductive, despite the important role they were playing towards the present and future generations, in food production, health nutrition, etc. Most representatives agreed that women's legal position was on the whole satisfactory in their countries, but attitudes and lack of knowledge impeded women's assuming their roles side by side with men. One delegate summarized the situation of women in Africa: "Traditionally.. the women have been working side by side with their menfolk on the farms and in other heavy household chores, in addition to their maternal and home-making duties. Today, for example, the market women of West Africa are an economic force to be reckoned with, and most of the rural women are engaged in cottage industries. The way our urban women have organized themselves into professional bodies and co-operative societies is very commendable. What is required now is to improve the quality of the contribution of our women to economic development".

19. Several speakers in the Plenary referred to the ECA African Training and Research Centre for Women as a model for activity in other regions. Interest in ECA's Training and Research Centre for Women was widespread - in particular because it is the only existing regional activity of its sort. Additionally, the establishment of an international research centre on women was proposed; and Iran offered to host such an institution. The Chief of the Human Resources Development Division of ECA spoke on the many endeavours of the Commission, since its establishment in 1958, to accelerate the integration of women in the region's development effort. He described the planned programme activities of the Africa Training and Research Centre for Women, commending the new awareness among Governments in the region of the necessity of promoting greater participation of women in the development effort, with special attention to the women living and working in the rural areas. Among others, the representatives of OAU, UNDP, UNICEF and FAO confirmed their support of the ECA Centre.

20. The Plenary debate on the question of Development brought out many issues relevant to the Africa Region. Of primary importance to the developing countries was the issue of the New International Economic Order, as a pre-requisite to or an essential element in the provision of opportunities for women's advancement. Some speakers noted that the side-effects of economic growth were not always positive for women, and attention of governments and international agencies must be drawn to this fact. Women were often confined to traditional activities, with little attention paid to the essential nature of their work, while men entered the modern sectors of their developing economies.

21. The situation of women in urban slums and shanty towns demanded attention, as well as that of women in rural areas. Population policy was referred to as having a direct relationship to women's situation. A major theme of the Conference speakers was that legislative action, while essential, offered no guarantee of women's full integration. Therefore a wide variety of opportunities should be created, including placement of women in planning and decision-making posts, and establishing national bodies to monitor the progress of women's advancement. Research was considered vital, especially concerning the source and evolution of attitudes of both men and women towards women's role.

22. The need for a determined and co-ordinated effort by all partners in the development process -- national, bilateral, international -- was often reiterated. As was forcibly pointed out by one speaker, "What is needed is not only a fundamental change of attitude, but one that is translated without delay into modification of existing structures and the establishment of new ones -- almost, in fact, another industrial revolution".

VII. Committee I

Agenda: Item 11: World Plan of Action

23. The Secretariat of the United Nations, and a Consultative Committee, had prepared a draft World Plan of Action for consideration by Committee I. While affirming the draft in principle, many delegates stressed the need for relating it more closely to other United Nations proclamations, such as the New International Economic Order; others underlined the importance of giving high priority to the needs of the largest numbers of women in the developing countries, -- those in the rural areas and the urban poor. Many pointed out that higher economic growth did not necessarily effect an improvement in the participation of women.

24. Among the subjects brought forth for integration in the Plan were the relationships between population conditions and the situation of women, the effects of internal and international migration on women, the possible re-distribution of functions and responsibilities in the family, the role of the mass-media in changing attitudes, the need for women to have an equal share in education and training opportunities, and in technological developments. It was suggested that outdated international conventions and declarations that might have adverse effect on women's employment opportunities should be reviewed, and that regional or national research centres be established to study the problems of women. The creation of national machineries, such as national commissions and women's bureaux, to promote the advancement of women, was emphasized.

25. Following submission of some 300 proposed amendments to the Plan of Action, informal working groups were appointed within the Committee to revise the Introduction and Chapter I of the draft Plan. These revisions, together with the remainder of the draft Plan, were approved in Committee and transmitted to the Plenary. Incorporated in the Plan of Action were the Regional Plans of Action for Africa and Asia.

26. The Committee also considered it necessary to adopt a succinct Declaration on the Equality of Women and their Contribution to Development and Peace. A draft was presented by the Committee of 77. The Declaration emphasizes that "under-development imposes upon women a double burden of exploitation which must be rapidly eliminated,

and that full implementation of national development policies to this objective is seriously hindered by the existing inequitable system of international economic relations. It also notes that "the attainment of economic and social goals, so basic to the rights of women, do not, however, of themselves bring about the full integration of women in development... unless specific measures are undertaken. It is therefore important to formulate and implement models of development that will promote the participation and advancement of women in all fields...." The Declaration refers to modernization of the agricultural sector as an indispensable element for progress, and, simultaneously, a means of creating opportunities for millions of rural women to participate in development. It then calls upon Governments, the United Nations, its specialized agencies and other competent regional and international organizations to "support projects designed to utilize the maximum potential and to develop the self-reliance of rural women". Measures aimed at a more intensified integration of women in development can only be successfully implemented if made an integral part of overall social and economic growth.

27. Committee I also forwarded five resolutions to the Plenary, as follows:

Resolution I: Research and training for the advancement of women in Africa

and welcomes the decision of the ECA Conference of Ministers at Nairobi to establish the African Training and Research Centre for Women (resolution 269(XII), 28 February 1975), and supports the decision of the Pan-African Women's Organization to establish also a training centre for the advancement of women, and calls upon Governments and NGOs, as well as United Nations agencies to assist these centres, and requests the two sponsors to

co-ordinate their efforts.

Resolution II: International co-operation under projects designed to achieve the objectives of the World Plan of Action

Resolution III: The status of women in South Africa, Namibia and Southern Rhodesia, urges all Governments to apply political, economic, social and military sanctions, and to adopt other measures to expedite self-government in these areas.

Resolution IV recommends to ECOSOC, inter alia, to "provide, within the framework of the regional economic commissions, the staff and other resources necessary for the development of regional programmes to implement the Plan of Action and to improve the condition of women".

Resolution V: Women and health, promotes the interests of women, and, by inference, of children, in respect of health care.

VIII. Committee II

Agenda item 9: Current trends and changes in the status and roles of women and men, and major obstacles to be overcome in the achievement of equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities

item 10: The integration of women in the development process as equal partners with men

28. Government representatives were given opportunity to report on the position of women in their respective countries, with special attention to their integration in development. Almost all reported that there were no legal barriers, and women were not consciously discriminated against. Many representatives stated that two of the major causes of discrimination were the customs and the attitudes inherent in their societies. This view was particularly stressed by representatives from Latin America, Africa and Asia. There was a strong feeling among the developing countries - especially the Latin American group, supported by the East European group - that there should be a new world economic order, because the problems of women in the developing countries were very closely related to the general underdevelopment of these countries.

29. Many representatives voiced their concern that, although women in the rural areas were involved in economic activities, their contribution was generally not taken into account when formulating development programmes. These women were consequently experiencing grave hardships due to migration of men, lack of training, lack of credit facilities and of extension services, and water supplies, etc.

30. Education and training: Although equal access to education and training was granted by law in most countries, the level of women's participation in these two sectors was not yet satisfactory. One reason for this situation in the developing countries was said to be the inhibitions and conflicts created in women themselves, when they were torn between continuing their education or marrying and having children. Furthermore, they were rarely given assistance in combining these roles.

31. Participants recommended that research should be undertaken to identify the customs, practices, attitudes and prejudices that hindered the advancement of women. The results of such a study should be used to enlighten public opinion on the need for women to be educated together with men.

32. The Family: Some countries - especially the Latin American group - felt strongly that the family should be the only recognized social unit; the developed countries stressed that this approach could prejudice the opportunities of women in other social units. The rights of individuals and couples to decide responsibly the number and spacing of children and the right to the means for doing so was re-affirmed. Polygamy, dowry, and minimum-age of marriage were also discussed.

33. Politics/Law: It was pointed out that, although women had the right to vote and stand for election, they often failed to use these rights. It was therefore recommended that women should form civic pressure groups to influence voting in favour of women's needs, and women candidates. National machineries such as commissions on women and development and women's bureaux were encouraged, to be established at the highest possible levels.

34. Integration of Women in the Development Process: It was made clear that it was not only a question of economic growth, or the stage of economic development, which affected the integration of women. Specific measures were needed to promote the access of women to the tools and positions to play their part.

35. Resolutions: 58 draft resolutions emerging from the deliberation were consolidated so that only 20 were finally adopted, for presentation to Plenary. Those whose subjects are of special interest to the Africa Region are as follows:

(a) Research:

There was much concern over the lack of hard data on the participation of women in development. The Resolution on the formulation of policies concerning the integration of women in the development process requests the Secretary-General to establish a United Nations system-wide research programme on the position and role of women in development, to obtain qualitative and quantitative data, and to present to the 60th session of ECOSOC a report on both the on-going and planned research, and disseminate the findings.

The Resolution on research on population and the integration of women in development recommends research on migration of men as it affects the quality of family life and the condition of women, and on the relationship of child-bearing to maternal morbidity and mortality, and infant mortality, among other issues.

The Resolution on revision and expansion of international standard classifications of occupations requests study of all categories within the existing classifications that imply that a job can only be done by either a female or a male, with the aim of making any necessary re-definitions of current classifications. It also requests the United Nations to assist governments in the conduct of national censuses, to include proper classification of the actual functions of women who are not currently defined as economically active. These new categories would include caring for dependents, housework, all forms of domestic production, and so forth.

The Resolution on an international research and training institute for the promotion of women requests the Secretary-General to appoint a group of experts to assist him in the establishment of this institute and to draw up its terms of reference.

(b) Disadvantaged women in rural and urban areas:

The Resolution on the condition of women in rural areas takes note of women's role in production and processing of foods, calls on governments "to identify needs and to formulate and implement, with greater financial and policy support, rural development programmes, particularly those which benefit women living in situations of rural poverty and of disadvantage" and to gather data necessary to "identify and evaluate the participation of women in productive life, and measure the results" of rural development programmes. It also requests international agencies to review their assistance to rural development, vis-a-vis the integration of women and girls.

The Resolution on access of women to financial assistance recommends that governments establish mechanisms to meet the needs for credit of women in low-income groups, both rural and urban, and facilitate the access of women in low-income groups to existing financial institutions. It also encourages the initiatives of NGOs and voluntary women's organizations to establish their own financial institutions and banks.

(c) Popular participation in development:

The Resolution on political and social participation recommends, inter alia, that governments "should establish national commissions (on women and development)... at the highest political level where appropriate and in a manner to be determined by governments, in order to ensure the active participation of women in structural reforms and the achievement of economic and social development and international peace".

The Resolution on popular participation recommends to member States that they sponsor voluntary social promotion programmes, such as self-help groups, co-operatives, women's groups and other organizations.

(d) Health and the family:

The Resolution on the protection of maternal and child health and that on family planning cover these issues; that on prevention of exploitation of women and girls urges governments to take energetic action to put an end to forced prostitution and traffic in women, considering these forms of exploitation. The Resolution on the Family stresses its primary role in human society.

(e) Education and training:

The Resolution proposes a long series of actions to ensure opportunities for women and girls, and to revise attitudes which tend to leave women out of the mainstream of the development process. The Resolution on the communications media calls for the active participation of mass communication agencies in the process of education.

(f) Equality between men and women:

The Resolution calls for the speediest ratification of the relevant conventions and other instruments elaborated by the United Nations system, and commends the progress made on the drafting of an international convention relating to women's roles in all fields, to be given high priority in 1976.

IX. Adoption of the report

36. The Declaration, the World Plan of Action, and all those Resolutions noted above were adopted within the final Plenary meeting, 2 July 1975.

X. African caucus

37. A series of caucuses for African delegations were convened by the OAU representative during the Conference. The first of these was devoted to the establishment and functioning of the ECA African Training and Research Centre for Women. The leader of ECA delegation explained the history and nature of the work, and responded to questions. As a result of the caucuses, the resolutions concerning Africa Regional action as noted above, were agreed upon. The group unanimously recommended that the ECA should look into the possibility of convening a regional meeting to consider the phasing of the Centre's activities and what essential support should be forthcoming from African governments and women's organizations.

38. The ECA delegation took advantage of opportunities presented during the African group meetings, to arrange follow-up meetings with African national delegations, for planning the Itinerant Training of Trainers in Programmes to Improve the Quality of Rural Life, for countries which had not already hosted the training. Also, schedules were finalized for the seminars on National Commissions and Women's Bureaux, in countries desiring them. Several contacts were also made with potential bilateral donors to the Centre and/or to national projects.

XI. Documents concerning the Africa Region

39. Two ECA documents were made available to all delegations attending the Conference:

(a) The Role of Women in Africa Development (E/CONF.66/BP/8);

(b) Plan of Action: Regional Seminar for Africa on the Integration of Women in Development with Special Reference to Population Factors (ST/ESA/SER.B/6/Add.1).

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