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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Resumed twenty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 667TH MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 9 December 1976, at 3.20 p.m.

Chairman: Mrs. GUEYE (Senegal)

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INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS RELATING TO THE STATUS OF WOMEN (agenda item 3) (continued)

(a) DRAFT CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (continued): ARTICLE 21 (E/CN.6/591 and Add.1; E/CN.6/L.700, L.701, L.705; E/CN.6/NGO/272 and Add.1) (continued)

1. The CHAIRMAN invited the Commission to continue its consideration of article 21.

2. Mrs. VENEZI-COSMETATOS (Greece) said that she had listened with interest to the views expressed by various delegations. She realized that there were certain divergences of opinion, but it was essential to face the facts. All the members of the Commission were agreed on the need to prepare an instrument on the elimination of discrimination against women, and had devoted a great deal of time and effort to it. But a declaration of principle, unaccompanied by guarantees, was useless. The Belgian proposal should be adopted. Her delegation was certainly against any proliferation of committees or commissions but felt that, in the interest of the convention, it was essential in the present circumstances to establish a special committee.

3. Mr. NASIER (Indonesia) said he was convinced of the need to create effective machinery to monitor the implementation of the convention; but that machinery should function in the countries themselves, at the national level. That was why his delegation supported the Indian proposal to strengthen the role of national commissions and non-governmental organizations which would help Governments in their efforts to implement the provisions of the convention and assist in the preparation of reports. A supervisory system of that nature would be simple, practical and inexpensive.

4. The representative of the Division of Human Rights had drawn attention to the supplementary expenditure that the establishment of a special committee would entail. In view of the high cost of such a body, the demands made on the developing countries might discourage them from ratifying the convention. Reference had, however, been made to a convention under which a small group had been entrusted with the task of considering the reports transmitted by Governments. His delegation would therefore support the establishment of a small group, composed of members of the Commission, which would meet before the Commission's session as proposed by the delegation of India.

5. Mr. EHSASSI (Iran) noted that the Commission had now discussed the various versions of article 21 which had been proposed at length and in depth. He therefore thought that when the list of speakers was exhausted, the Commission should adjourn the meeting and set up a small working party to draft a text acceptable to all delegations.

6. Begum Tazeen FARIDI (Pakistan) said she had been astonished to hear that the Commission was a political body. The Commission had been established as a result of the steady pressure exerted by women's organizations in the world in order to promote the cause of women. It was above any political considerations. It endeavoured to ascertain what was good or bad for women, and not for countries. It was composed of women experts who placed women's interests before everything else, and she expressed the hope that it would continue to work in that spirit.

7. Mr. VALLARTA (Mexico) said that, after listening to the various arguments presented, his delegation was convinced that it would be undesirable to encourage the proliferation of bodies - of which there were already so many - concerned with the protection of human rights within the United Nations system. The task of monitoring the implementation of the convention should be entrusted to the Commission. The latter lacked the authority to set up a sub-commission, but it could provide for the establishment of such an organ either in the body of the convention or in a separate resolution. It could be stated that priority would be given to States parties in the selection of the members of the sub-commission, and the criterion of equitable geographical distribution would have to be borne in mind. A clause could also be added to the effect that States parties to the convention which were not members of the Commission could be appointed by the Commission as members of the sub-commission.

8. He supported the Iranian proposal that a working party should be set up to draft a compromise text.

9. Mrs. TALLAWY (Egypt) said that the information presented to the Commission indicated that the covenants on economic and social rights and the conventions on human rights made provision for the submission of reports by Governments and their consideration either by a special committee or by the body which had drawn up the instrument. The Commission itself could not monitor the implementation of the convention, not because it was not competent to do so, but because its agenda was too heavy for it to consider in detail how the convention was being implemented in various countries and to make certain that domestic legislation was brought into line with its provisions. If the aim really was to ensure the implementation of the convention, that task would therefore have to be entrusted to a specialized body, either a special committee or some other entity. It was clear that responsibility for the implementation of the convention lay with the competent national authorities and that they should set up national commissions for that purpose; but the implementation of a legal instrument such as the convention should also be supervised at the international level. Such supervision, even if costly, was essential, because an effort had to be made on behalf of women.

10. All the members of the Commission had a common objective, which was to ensure that the provisions of the convention were properly implemented. They now had to agree on how that objective could best be achieved. To that end, the Commission should, as the Iranian delegation had proposed, set up a working party to draft a text acceptable to all delegations.

11. Mrs. OSCHINSKY (Belgium) said that some interesting conclusions could be drawn from the explanations given at the previous meeting by officials of the Division of Human Rights. Most of the conventions on human rights made provision for a system by which their implementation could be supervised. Those systems varied, but they had certain features in common, one of the most important being that the experts who constituted the supervisory body were never paid by the countries of which they were nationals; they were paid either by all member States or by the United Nations. Moreover, the experts who were called upon to supervise the implementation of an instrument were nationals of countries bound by that instrument, and not of countries which had not ratified it. Lastly, various intricate measures had been taken to ensure equitable geographical distribution.

12. Those three features could be combined in the system proposed by Belgium. That system had been devised with the assistance of a body on which all the most active Belgian women's organizations were represented. They had tried to find the solution which would make the convention as strong as possible.

13. She understood the objections raised by the developing countries which would have to contribute to the financing of that supervisory body, and for that reason it might be preferable for the United Nations to bear the cost. It would also be necessary to ensure equitable geographical distribution, so that no group of countries would feel put out by the intervention of that body. Her delegation approved the idea of associating national women's organizations with the preparation of government reports.

14. All members of the Commission hoped that the convention would be ratified by a large number of States. If it was, the supervisory body would have to consider a large number of reports, which would involve a considerable amount of meticulous work.

15. The CHAIRMAN, reverting to the Iranian delegation's suggestion, proposed the adjournment of the meeting so that a working party, consisting of all delegations which had made specific proposals (namely, the delegations of the following countries: Belgium, Colombia, Iran, India, Egypt, Hungary, Mexico, the USSR and the United States of America) could meet. All delegations which wished to do so could take part in the working party, which would be presided over by Mrs. Gonzalez de Cuadres, Chairman of the Commission.

16. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 3.45 p.m.