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THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN:
BACKGROUND, DEVELOPMENT AND OBJECTIVES *)

The Nairobi conference is the third of a series of conferences and might be regarded as the culmination of the activities of the United Nations Decade for Women. Those of us who have been following the women's issue over a long-term period recognize this conference as a major undertaking not only to review the past of the women's programme as it has evolved in the UN, but also to determine the fate and the destiny of the women's programme, not only at the international level, but also at the national and regional levels. The question is often asked, what, in fact, the UN has achieved and what some of its concrete accomplishments are, and I think in all objectivity that the contributions of the United Nations, both on the part of member governments and on the part of the secretariat, to evolving the women's issue, can be considered a major accomplishment of the world organization.

In 1945 the United Nations already had the Subcommission on Women's Rights. When the charter was approved, it was decided to have the Commission on Human Rights, and the delegations at the time felt there was no need to have a special body for women's rights, since this was already subsumed under human rights. Fortunately, a group of women who were militant and brave enough at the early period resisted this and said "No, we do need a body which will deal exclusively with the status of women", which is how in 1948 the Commission on the Status of Women was created as a body coequal with the Commission on Human Rights. That commission is still the main legislative body which the Branch for the Advancement of Women services up to now. And I think it is interesting to note that over the years the Commission on the Status of Women has also adapted to the

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changing socio-economic and political trends which were reflected in the United Nations.

The main emphasis of the work of the Commission on the Status of Women during the early days was in the formulation of universal legal standards, and this is why the main thrust was on legal matters. The early achievements included the Convention on Political Rights, the recommendations on minimum age of marriage, registration of marriage, etc. Also in the specialized agencies, the formulation of universal standards in labor, in education etc. was the main thrust. However, as the United Nations began to have more members of the Third World, and the issues of poverty, hunger and population began to dominate the thinking of the world body - this was also reflected in the proclamation of the First Development Decade and the Second Development Decade - the Commission on the Status of Women also realized that it had now to look into not only the equality aspects of the situation of women, not only women's rights, but also how they were being integrated in development, as they were affected by the problems of marginalization, poverty, hunger, etc.

I am saying this because I think that it is important that the women's issue has gradually earned recognition. It has not been an easy development. In fact, if I may be frank, in those early days in the 1950s, 1955 to 1960, the women's issue was not taken very seriously; delegations mainly gave lip service to the issue.

But in the succeeding years, as the issue of development has been taken more and more seriously by governments, I think there was a conscious recognition that women were in fact a part of the economic and political life of each member state. This was very graphically demonstrated when the issue of population finally became accepted in the United Nations around 1967 - 1968. The Commission on the Status of Women appointed a rapporteur to study the link between the status of women and population. That special rapporteur was Mrs. Helvi Sipilä, who was my predecessor. I refer to people like her because it is people like Mrs. Sipilä and some others who have seen the gradual evolution of the women's issue in our world organization.

What I am saying is linked with the decision of the General Assembly to

designate 1975 as International Women's Year. In the United Nations issues have a certain organic growth; they evolve because of certain forces, and I believe the women's issue can be understood along these lines. With the interest in population and other development issues, with the increasing number of dedicated women in the United Nations and with the realization of the Commission on the Status of Women that they had to move more quickly into the development field, the General Assembly decided to designate 1975 as International Women's Year. If I may be allowed to inject a personal note, it was I who chaired the 1974 session of the commission on the Status of Women where it was decided that it should be recommended to the General Assembly that 1975 should be the International Women's Year.

Mexico (the World Conference of the International Women's Year, held in Mexico City, 19 June - 2 July 1975) was a landmark in the women's programme in the United Nations. For the first time in history of - I was going to say mankind, I think I should say humankind - an inter-governmental conference was held at a high level with the majority of member states attending and addressing themselves to the question of women. Two important documents arose from Mexico, the Plan of Action of Mexico and the Declaration of Mexico. Those of you who want to have some historical background in this issue I think would be benefitted by reading these two documents. The plan of Mexico is fairly simple - later on I shall explain the mechanisms of a global conference - but the Mexico conference was really organized without too much preparation. The notice was quite short, we did not have the regional meetings which we now have for Nairobi nor the preparatory work of a preparatory body, but nevertheless those documents which emanated from Mexico are still worth looking back to.

In Mexico the complexity of the women's issue was already demonstrated. As you know, the theme of the decade is equality, development and peace, and by thinking of these three issues one understands that the programme on women covers nearly every aspect of human life.

In Mexico, also, we saw the emergence of the political problems which are associated with the women's issue. At that time, apartheid was still more controversial than it is now, the situation of Palestinian women arose, as well as that of refugee women, and the political implications of these aspects were brought up.

At the time of the announcement of the United Nations Decade for Women, 1976 - 1985, there was a decision to have a mid-decade conference to review the progress which had been made during the first five years. The Copenhagen Conference (The World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, held in Copenhagen, 14 - 30 July 1980) came up with a program of action. In the organization of the Copenhagen conference there was already the same mechanism which we are now having for Nairobi. I shall explain this mechanism afterwards.

Mexico contributed very much to what is now known as "consciousness raising". Before Mexico the women's issue was a concern mainly of non-governmental organizations, the NGOs who would faithfully come to the meetings in the third committee year in and year out to follow the debates, but in 1975 the governments demonstrated their support, their solidarity, their concern, their interest in the women's programme.

Copenhagen can be seen as a further concretization of the plan of action of Mexico. The attempt of the delegations then was to see how in Copenhagen a more concrete program of action could be followed, flowing from the plan of action of Mexico. Again it still makes good reading. What I am saying is just because we have a series of conferences every five years and just because we have plans of action adopted at these conferences it does not mean that the final documents are in fact implemented before the next conference takes place.

For the Nairobi Conferences, as for the Copenhagen conference, the UN General Assembly has designated a preparatory body to make the main recommendations to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. The preparatory body made recommendations on the agenda of the conference, the documentation, the rules of procedure and they have also indicated what the priorities are which should be reflected in one of the major documents, "The Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women". You might look at the preparatory body as a kind of a think-tank which guides the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly in making the final decisions about these conferences.

The third and perhaps the last session of the preparatory body will take place here in Vienna in this building from March 4th to 14th, and those of you who are interested in the women's conference, I would suggest that you follow it because this will be quite an accurate indicator of what the temperature will be in Nairobi. In other words, some of the main decisions will be taking place, and although the preparatory body is composed of only 32 members, they represent all of the five regions of the world. There, I think, we shall get in miniature a foretaste of Nairobi. We also expect quite a number of observer states, since we are approaching the last lap, and there is a lot of interest demonstrated by Member States, not only those in the European region, but also those that are further away.

A global conference is important in that it is a world-wide undertaking, and it is always a problem for us - and I am sure you know about it in the secretariat - of how a global conference really reflects the priorities and concerns of the entire world. When you look at the women's issue, as I said, it really touches on every aspect of life. How do we go global? How do we harmonize the concerns of a woman in the rural areas of Nepal and a woman who is working in New York City? As you know, one of the measures which we undertake in the United Nations is the holding of regional meetings. And I think that it can be said in our perspective that for the Nairobi conference the regional meetings have been very important. But I think this is natural because as we become more specialized in the women's field there is a need to become more and more concrete in the recommendations and in the measures which we are taking.

The recommendations of the regional meetings will all be put in one document. For the third session of the preparatory body this is, I think, an important document because it shows a great awareness of the women and of what their concerns in the regions are. In Latin America I perceived a very great sense among women of what is happening to the region in terms of the debt crisis, in terms of the political situation. This is also true in Africa. I think there was there a precise analysis of the issues of the economic situation, of industrialization, the role of women in agriculture etc. And although it will perhaps make more complicated and more difficult the exercise of finding global consenses, the inputs of all the regions, ESCAP, ECWA, ECLAC, ECA and ECE, include some very precise recommendations. On the other hand, it is also interesting to know that

despite different priorities and areas of concern the women of the world also have identified some common problems. Certainly the issues of marginalization and discrimination are world-wide, even for the European region. If you read the recommendations of the seminar of the ECE meeting, certainly this was one of the main themes which surfaced. Marginalization and discrimination, I think, are world-wide, and therefore the issue of equality is still one of the main thrusts of the decade.

In essence, that is the mechanism of the Nairobi conference. In so far as the conference secretariat is concerned, we are moving closer to Nairobi and this means that our links with the Kenyan government also become increasingly important. The Kenyan government, being the host government, of course is very hopeful that the Nairobi conference will be a successful one, that Nairobi in fact will be remembered in the United Nations and by member governments as a conference which has helped rather than detracted from pushing the women's programme forward.

What are the ingredients of a successful conference? Of course there are many. But I think that one can identify a few. I have referred to the documentation of the conference. This is important, as well as the right kind of publicity. But finally, it depends on the will of member governments as to how they regard the women's issue. We hope that there will be a broad area of consensus even in the areas where agreement might be difficult to arrive at. This will naturally take negotiation, dialogue, and if you have heard some of my statements before the General Assembly and the preparatory body, I have appealed to women to learn in preparing for the Nairobi conference how to conduct dialogue and to negotiate. One of the difficulties in our presenting the women's issue at the national level is that there is a kind of a dichotomy between the substantive issues of the women's programme which have to do with nutrition, family planning and equality, and the political issue, which are dealt with by the foreign office, which means they are mainly dealt with by men. And I think this is a dichotomy which has to be resolved at the national level in order that the kind of dialogue which has to take place in formulating the national position and which will harmonize the concerns of women and the concerns of diplomats will somehow be brought together. I believe that in Nairobi this kind of capacity to negotiate, to find common ground will, be crucial to the success of a global conference like the one we are preparing for.

I will very briefly go to some of the main achievements of the decade. The question has been asked: "Has the decade really been successful or is it just another decade? What has it done? Has the woman who is ploughing the fields in Zaire, really heard of the decade, or is it so much effort at the national level, for which we are all working so hard, but really nothing goes down?" The decade, of course, is an international undertaking, we cannot solve all of the problems of the women of the world. After all, they comprise half of the world's population. But I think it can be said with some certainty, and I think with some pride, that yes, the women's decade has made some difference in the lives of women. As I said, the fact that the women's issue is now a concern of governments indicates that resources are being placed there, that there is in fact implementation on a more massive scale than if it were handled traditionally by the non-governmental organizations, who by the way continue to play a very important catalytic role.

If we go by the three themes of the decade, equality, development and peace, certainly there is a greater sense of giving women more equality. In legislation this is a major achievement. There are now 65 member states who have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against women; New Zealand is the newest state party to that convention. One of the concrete achievement of the decade is the establishment of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which is meeting here in Vienna beginning Monday, which will now examine the ways in which the states parties have in fact been implementing the convention. That is a step.

But if you say equality has been attained in legislation, I think we have to be careful in saying quickly that even if women now can work, however, there are no supportive services to help women to implement their dual or triple role of being bread winners and also responsible for family life. Even if there is equality in opportunities, there still is inequality in pay etc.

The same can be said in the area of development. Certainly there are more women who are contributing to the national economies, certainly there is greater recognition of women; there are more women in science and technology. But still, if you go to the ministries of planning, if you talk with statisticians, there is really no recognition of the role of women in the

technical sense. In national accounting systems, in the GNP, there is really no indication that the contribution of women is there. The fact that household work, for instance, is non-quantified, and yet women spend a great deal of their lives working at home, enabling men to follow successful careers, is not reflected in the gross national product of a country. So, it is as I said, so much remains to be done.

In this issue of peace, I believe that women have contributed. There are more, they say, women in the diplomatic service. But I think one of the contributions again in preparing for, one of the main achievements in contributing to Nairobi, is the fact that we are examining and analyzing the issue of peace in a more careful way. And certainly peace, in contrast to Mexico and Copenhagen, is going to emerge as an issue of broad concern among Member States. Because when you say peace, it does not only mean disarmament, it does not only mean peaceful uses of nuclear energy, but it also means domestic peace, the issues of rape, violence against women. Assault against women is also a global issue; I think this is one of the issues which has emerged also regionwide. We thought in the beginning that this was only something which we could see in the industrialized countries; but really it is of a global nature.

So, as we face 1985, I think we can say, those of us who have worked in the United Nations, in the legislative bodies as well as in the secretariat, that this has been an achievement of the world organization. In fact, I think one can say that the women's revolution has been one of the quiet but very profound revolutions of our time. It will continue to be so as women become more confident, as women will more and more enter the political arena, and we hope that the men will take serious notice of this phenomenon. It is no longer a phenomenon which can be discussed with tongue in cheek, or along the lines of: "Well, what else do the women want", or "Well, let's give the women what they want, and then just go ahead and do things the way they have been done in the past". The configurations have changed drastically and we can really never go back to the past again. I think these signals must be read.

However, there is a need now to harmonize between men and women some of the common concerns. The issues of family employment are also emerging and these are concerns which have to be dealt with in terms of partnership.

Certainly the economic issues: we are facing a not very bright economic future, and I think this is one of the ironies of the decade, that the economic situation was better when the decade began than at its end. Also the demographic statistics are important. The fact that there will be 1.3 billion people in the North as opposed to 5.7 billion people in the South by the year 2000 has implications for the role of women.

Are we now facing a situation where the women more and more will be asked what really, what kind of society do we want? Will women be asked what kind of national development plan do you want? Are you in favour of environment: if we industrialize do we take into account environment, migration etc.? In other words, if women become more active in decision-making processes are we in fact going to have a better and a changed society, in which some of the models of growth which we have accepted unquestioningly will be questioned, will be criticized, will be altered, will be revised in order that we can have a better future for our children?

These are some of the questions before Nairobi. And I very much hope that the member governments will recognize the challenges which are there. And I also hope that men and women will see to it that the Nairobi conference will push forward the women's programme in order that the years we face ahead will bring a more just and a more noble society with the collaboration of men.

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DEVELOPMENT, CRISIS AND ALTERNATIVE VISIONS: THIRD WORLD WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES

Systemic Crises, Reproduction Failures and Women's Potential

At the outset let us spell out the distinction between the two types of crisis that afflict us today. The word "crisis" has been so overused that it is important to clarify what we mean by it. When a structure or system reaches a stage when it must either undergo major changes or break down, it is in a state of crisis. Temporary solutions may mitigate some of its effects, but so long as its main structural causes remain untouched, the crisis persists, demanding resolution, and things cannot go back to "business as usual".

In this sense we argue that a crisis now affects both the world economic system and the structures through which the majority of the world's populations reproduce themselves. By reproduction we mean the process by which human beings meet their basic needs and survive from one day to the next. Since most people are part of a larger economic system - regional, national, or international - their own reproduction is not independent of the healthy functioning of the larger system (1). But the two are by no means congruent. The economic system may show vigour and dynamism while people's basic needs remain unmet, or even worsen (2). On the other hand, the basic needs of the poor may be met although the growth rate and per capita income remain low (3). The reproduction of human beings depends to a considerable extent on state policies toward the agrarian sector, toward employment, and toward direct expenditures on basic needs fulfilment and poverty elimination. In the absence of explicit policies to meet the basic needs of the poor, economic growth will improve the conditions of human reproduction *only* if it increases the employment and real incomes of the population at large. For example, export cropping in a previously self-provisioning area may reduce peoples' access to land or other resources without increasing employment, or even if it increases employment, it may