

# UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.  
GENERAL

E/CN.6/SR.223  
25 June 1956

ENGLISH

Original: ENGLISH and  
FRENCH

AUG 21 1956

UN/SA COLLECTION

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Tenth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY-THIRD MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Friday, 23 March 1956, at 3 p.m.

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Present:

Chairman:

Mrs. RÖSSEL (Sweden)

Members:

Mrs. CORREA MORALES de APARICIO	Argentina
Miss GIBSON	Australia
Mrs. CISELET	Belgium
Mrs. NOVIKOVA	Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
Mrs. CHU	China
Miss MAÑAS	Cuba
Miss BERNARDINO	Dominican Republic
Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX	France
Miss ROESAD	Indonesia
Mrs. BEN-ZVI	Israel
Mrs. DEMBINSKA	Poland
Mr. GIRON	Sweden
Mrs. SPIRIDONOVA	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Dame Lucile SAYERS	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Mrs. HAHN	United States of America
Mrs. SANCHEZ de URDANETA	Venezuela
Mrs. MITROVIĆ	Yugoslavia

Observers for Governments of States Members of the United Nations:

Mr. STOYANOV	Bulgaria
Mr. STRNAD	Czechoslovakia
Miss CORCOS	Italy

Representatives of specialized agencies:

International Labour Organisation	Mrs. FIGUEROA
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	Miss SALAS
World Health Organization	Miss HOWELL

Representative of an inter-governmental organization:

Inter-American Commission of Women	Miss IUTZ
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Representatives of non-governmental organizations:Category A

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions	Mrs. EKENDAHL
International Federation of Christian Trade Unions	Miss NAGEIS Mrs. SCHMIDT
World Federation of Trade Unions	Mr. DRINKWATER Mrs. NOCE
World Federation of United Nations Associations	Mrs. KRETSCHMER Mrs. TROUPIN

Category B

Catholic International Union for Social Service	Miss BOSMANS Miss HERTOEGHE Miss de ROMER
International Council of Women	Mrs. CARTER Miss van EEGHEN
International Federation "Amies de la Jeune Fille"	Mrs. WOOD
International Federation of Business and Professional Women	Mrs. FINIDORI
International Federation of University Women	Mrs. FIECHTER Miss ROBB
International Federation of Women Lawyers	Lady CHATTERJEE Miss MANFREDINI
International League for the Rights of Man	Mrs. WOLLE-EGENOLF
International Union for Child Welfare	Mrs. SMALL
Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations	Mrs. de CAZOTTE Miss van EEGHEN Mrs. PRINCE Mrs. WIBLE
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom	Mrs. BAER
World Movement of Mothers	Miss DHELLEMES
World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations	Miss ARNOULD Miss de ROMER
World's Women's Christian Temperance Union	Mrs. CHAIX-CONSTANTIN
World Young Women's Christian Association	Miss ARNOLD
Young Christian Workers	Miss PEZZULLO

Representatives of non-governmental organizations (continued)

Register

Open Door International

Mrs. BAER

St. Joan's International Social and  
Political Alliance

Miss CHALLONER

Secretariat:

Mrs. Tenison-Woods

Representative of the  
Secretary-General

Mrs. Grinberg-Vinaver

Secretary to the Commission

- 1.. ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN (item 7 of the agenda) (E/CN.6/L.200)  
(continued)  
(d) Report on cottage industries and handicrafts (E/CN.6/282, E/CN.6/L.199)

The CHAIRMAN invited the Commission to consider the draft resolution on opportunities for women in handicrafts and cottage industries (E/CN.6/L.199) submitted by the delegations of Pakistan and the United States of America.

Mrs. NOCE (World Federation of Trade Unions), speaking at the invitation of the CHAIRMAN, emphasized the difference between handicrafts and cottage industries. The craftsman was an independent worker, selling to his clients, either directly or through co-operative societies, products generally of an artistic nature, sometimes based on folklore. The cottage industry worker worked for a contractor, and never marketed his products himself.

It was a common practice for men to work in handicrafts, but cottage industries were as a rule confined to women, so that the Commission on the Status of Women was more concerned with the latter. Women employed in cottage industries generally worked under very bad conditions. They were the victims of what used to be called "sweated labour", and were paid at rates scandalously far below the rates paid in factories. In many instances, a woman had to work fourteen to sixteen hours a day to make a living, and often had to enlist the help of her children of school age. The cottage industry worker was not entitled to any social security benefits. Hence the Commission must take action against such exploitation, and the International Labour Organization must make appropriate recommendations to put a stop to it. It was important that women working at home should be paid normal wages, and that their employers should make the regular social security contributions.

Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that parts of the Russian text of the draft resolution were not at all clear. She wondered what was meant by organizing handicraft and cottage industries products "on a sound basis".

Mrs. SPIRIDONOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) also found the Russian text of the draft resolution difficult to follow, in particular the references to "community production centres", and "safeguards against industrial homework".

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America) said that in referring to "safeguards against industrial homework" the authors of the draft resolution had in mind preventing "the farming out of production to home workers in backward conditions".

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) proposed the following amended wording for operative paragraph 2 of draft resolution E/CN.6/L.199:

"2. Requests the ILO in its further reports on this subject to give special attention to methods found useful for the proper organization of handicraft and cottage industry production and so to avert the evils of industrial homework".

One advantage of the new wording was, she said, that it met the comments of the representative of the World Federation of Trade Unions.

Mrs. CISELET (Belgium) seconded the proposal.

Dame Lucile SAYERS (United Kingdom) suggested that the last phrase in the last paragraph of the resolution should read: "and thus avoid the evils of industrial homework".

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) and Mrs. CISELET (Belgium) pointed out that the wording of the third paragraph of the preamble of the draft resolution ought also to be amended, and proposed the replacement of the words "in order to provide adequate safeguards against industrial homework" by the words "in order to prevent the abuses which may result from homework". That wording would have the advantage of condemning, not homework as such, but the abuses resulting from it.

Mrs. CISELET (Belgium) also proposed, in operative paragraph 1, the replacement of the words "give further consideration to" by the words "examine thoroughly".

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) supported that amendment. She also wondered why the draftsmen of the resolution had limited the application of the first paragraph of the preamble to "countries with an agricultural economy". Homework, she said, was a source of income in industrialized countries as well.

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America) said that it had not been the intention of the authors to restrict the scope of the resolution to agricultural countries. She therefore proposed adding the word "particularly" before the phrase "in countries with an agricultural economy" in the first paragraph of the preamble.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) accepted the United States representative's amendment.

Mrs. FIGUEROA (International Labour Organisation) said that she was not quite clear as to what the authors of the draft resolution had in mind. There were some points on which the various texts of the draft resolution did not appear to agree: "comercialización" in the Spanish text, for instance, was not quite the same as "marketing" in the English text. Similarly, she failed to see why cottage industries were described in the Spanish text as "industrias domésticas independientes".

Regarding the proposal to substitute the words "for the proper organization of" for the words "to organize on a sound basis", she doubted whether the amended text would carry all the desired implications.

If amended on the lines proposed by the French and Belgian representative, the text might give the false impression that the sole object of the draft resolution was to provide safeguards against the evils of industrial homework. That, to be sure, was one aim, but not the only one.

On the proposal of the CHAIRMAN, supported by Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic),

it was agreed to refer the draft resolution and the amendments proposed to it to the Resolutions Committee.

- (f) Working women, including working mothers, with family responsibilities, and means for the improvement of their position.

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America) said that her delegation welcomed the decision to study the question of working women with family responsibilities. The study should be designed not only to assist women in their dual role but also to draw attention to the value of the work they performed and the responsible place they held in the economy.

The question had many aspects. Among those which the Commission might study were the following: the responsibility of women for supporting members of their family; welfare facilities and services available to them as employees and as citizens; and the benefits to which they were entitled through insurance schemes, collective bargaining and other means of promoting the general welfare.

The Commission might wish to ask the International Labour Organisation to provide a brief analysis of those points which it had already considered.

That Organisation had made a preliminary survey of the question in 1948, and at its thirty-eighth session the International Labour Conference had adopted a resolution<sup>1)</sup> concerning the employment of women having dependent young children, in which it noted that such employment was tending to increase and expressed the desire that the United Nations and the specialized agencies pursue a concerted policy on the question.

Mrs. DEMBINSKA (Poland) hoped that the sub-item would appear regularly on the Commission's agenda.

With few exceptions, women had at all times performed a large amount of non-remunerative work at home. Now, however, women with family responsibilities working outside the home, were adding to the wealth of society, and they should be accorded better treatment. The problem was how to combine outside work with maternal and housekeeping responsibilities and with the joint responsibilities of parents for bringing up their children.

The working woman with family responsibilities could be assisted in a variety of ways. Her health could be safeguarded by such measures as paid leave during pregnancy and nursing periods. The length of such leave varied, being in some countries as much as fourteen weeks. In any event, it should never be less than four weeks and must be leave on full pay. The practice in pre-war Poland of allowing pregnant working women four weeks leave on half-pay only had defeated its own object.

Nursing mothers must be allowed time off each day in which to feed their babies. No woman must lose her job during pregnancy and nursing periods. Temporary leave of absence, without loss of pay, should also be granted to women with very young sick children. Other measures included the provision of medical facilities, milk centres and schools for inexperienced mothers. To enable mothers to work without anxiety about their children, crèches, kindergartens and nursery schools must be provided, together with clubs and special school facilities, such as mid-day meals for older children.

Although parents should not be relieved of their responsibility for bringing up their children, working mothers could be helped by institutions and centres. Courses and lectures could be organized by schools so that such time as working mothers could spend with their children would be put to the best

1. See: ILO Official Bulletin, Vol.XXXVIII, 1955, No.3, Resolution No.III.



account. Society could also help the working mother by eliminating those books, films and television programmes likely to have a bad influence on the young. For instance, admission to performances designed for adults could be prohibited.

To relieve working mothers of their purely domestic responsibilities, special restaurants, canteens and other centralized facilities, should be organized, possibly on a co-operative basis. Finally, facilities should be provided to train children in keeping the home in order. Effective action on such lines would solve the problem of the excessive burden borne by working women with family responsibilities.

Her delegation considered that it would be most useful to have an exchange of views between those countries where such measures had not yet been introduced, or were not working properly, and those where the position was more satisfactory.

Her delegation would be submitting a draft resolution on the subject.

Miss GIBSON (Australia), referring to the Polish representative's remarks about the deleterious effects of certain films, said that the Commission might be interested to know that in her State members of a women's voluntary organization watched films in their spare time to report on their suitability for children. Their recommendations were published weekly in one of the main newspapers, and members of the organization were sometimes approached individually by parents for further comments. That was an example of the way in which women could do useful voluntary work.

Miss NAGELS (International Federation of Christian Trade Unions), speaking at the invitation of the CHAIRMAN, said her Federation was warmly in favour of the United States proposal to invite the Commission to study the situation of women with family responsibilities and of mothers having charge of children. Too little was known about the situation of these classes of working women. Document E/CN.6/280, however, gave an outline of the form it took in certain countries. The Federation thought that a statement of the real responsibilities of married or single working women would be valuable, for it would help towards a just and fair determination of wages. The special problems of working women would only be solved by applying the principle of equal pay for equal work. When that principle was put into practice, a new phase would doubtless be reached: the establishment of effective equality between men and women despite their natural inequalities.

Lady Gladys CHATTERJEE (International Federation of Women Lawyers), speaking at the invitation of the CHAIRMAN, said that it was of paramount importance to women if they were to lead a full and useful life, that the burden of family responsibilities should not be unduly onerous nor prevent them from enjoying their full rights as citizens. Much time, thought and wisdom would be needed to elucidate the issues involved.

In considering what measures could be taken to attain the Commission's objective in that respect it would be possible to draw upon the experience of various countries as well as the help of the International Labour Organisation which had done so much already by drawing up in 1937 a "charter for women" calling for full political and civil rights, access to employment, education, protection against harmful employment, and during maternity. That Charter had later been supplemented by Convention No. 100, as well as by what had come to be known as the "Young Workers' Charter".

It now remained to ascertain whether the benefits would accrue only to working women, gainfully employed, with family responsibilities or whether the child would also come within its scope, as the Chairman had originally suggested. An improvement in conditions for some would bring about improvement for all, but reliable statistics could only be gathered for those in the category of the "gainfully employed".

The Commission could rely upon the ILO for statistical and other material and in its turn could help to further the objectives of the International Labour Organisation by pressing Member Governments to ratify its conventions and recommendations, and by bringing to the notice of governments the great benefits of the technical assistance programme. Mutatis mutandis the Commission could also count on the support of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The Commission would doubtless take heed of the French representative's warning against any appearance of favouring the opinion that the concepts of professional duty and family responsibilities were incompatible. It was essential to make sure that certain of the Commission's achievements, won after years of effort, should not be challenged afresh.

Another consideration to be borne in mind was that mentioned by the representative of the International Labour Organisation, that, so long as women

had duties over and above those imposed by their jobs, their efforts to secure equal pay might well be frustrated.

She would acquaint her Federation with the various points brought up so that it might brief its representatives with a clearer understanding of the problem in preparation for future discussions as to the best method of attaining the desired goal.

Miss DHELLEMMES (World Movement of Mothers), speaking at the invitation of the CHAIRMAN, expressed her Movement's satisfaction at the inclusion of item 7 (f) in the agenda. The concept of "work" was usually taken to mean only paid activity. Many occupations, however, were extremely useful even though unpaid; they should therefore be regarded as work, to be rated at its true worth and room should be made for it in the conditions of economic and social life. Those occupations included the school work of young persons, and many other kinds of educative, cultural and co-operative activities, such pre-eminently as a mother's work in the family and society. Her Movement asked the Commission to survey all the activities of women in every walk of life, in every position, and in every country, and to have regard both to their paid professional work and their activities in discharge of their family responsibilities. The proper means of improving the living conditions of women, and especially of mothers, would only be found after a complete preliminary study of those conditions had been made and their responsibilities had been listed in order of importance. Her Movement desired to re-state before the Commission the right of every woman to professional work. Professional life must be studied in all its aspects so that woman's personality and her economic contribution could both be given their true value.

Her Movement was concerned to draw the Commission's attention to the following points: firstly to the importance of further study of standards of value of women's professional work, so that the principle of equal pay for equal work might be justly applied; secondly, to the need to seek ways of adapting certain forms of work to the female constitution so that women might work at a rate and in a manner somewhat different from those of men but not be placed thereby in an inferior position; thirdly, to the value to young professional women of extra professional, family and domestic training during working hours.

Mothers' work in the home derived special importance from its long hours and from its human, economic and social value. In many ways mothers were irreplaceable; and they worked a very long day. French statistics, for instance, showed that the work which women did in their homes and for their families occupied more hours a day than did that of any professional occupation, either of men or of women, in industry, trade, agriculture, handicrafts, or the liberal professions. Much would have to be done to protect mothers from overwork in their own homes. Moreover, the economic value of a mother's domestic work was too often underestimated. The value of a mother's activity in family and social life could be measured simply by the great expense of engaging servants to replace her, and the costly consequences of her inability to look after her children. As the purchaser and user of a large share of the world's produce, she was an extremely important factor in determining the pattern of trade and production.

The Commission ought to study further, and constrain public opinion and the authorities to admit, the important and irreplaceable contribution which mothers made to the stability of the family, to children's health and education, and to economic, social and civic life. The conditions under which mothers fulfilled that duty must be studied, so that production might be directed towards improving their conditions of life and work and developing services to relieve them of the most arduous of their family burdens. All girls must receive a professional and technical training befitting their future responsibilities. Economic and social conditions must be so shaped as to enable mothers to discharge their duty to their homes.

Mrs. CISELET (Belgium), referring to the Polish representative's speech, spoke of Belgian law on the showing of films. It had been proved that some films might have a bad mental effect on the young. The Belgian Government had therefore set up boards of control to examine films, which had to be submitted to them before exhibition. When a board considered a film dangerous to the young, it forbade its exhibition to children under sixteen. A Bill now under consideration would forbid the display of certain films to children under eighteen.

Mrs. CORREA MORALES de APARICIO (Argentina) said that as she had not prepared a comprehensive statement on the very important item under discussion,

she would confine herself to informing the Commission first that in Argentina there was a special committee for selecting those films to which children under 16 years of age could be admitted; secondly, that a bill for the protection of mothers was under consideration and the possibility of their being granted benefits from a state compensation fund was being studied. In the meantime kindergartens were being opened and special rest-rooms for pregnant women were being provided by industrial firms. Once the bill had reached a more mature stage she would transmit the relevant information to interested international organizations.

Further discussion on item 7 (f) was deferred until the next meeting.

- (a) Preliminary memorandum concerning a survey of publications available on the occupational outlook for women in the fields of health, social welfare, engineering and architecture (E/CN.6/L.189)

Mrs. GRINBERG-VINAVIER, Secretary to the Commission, introducing item 7 (a), said that in conformity with the Commission's request at the ninth session<sup>1)</sup>, the Secretariat had prepared a "preliminary memorandum on the desirability of undertaking a survey of publications already available on the occupational outlook for women in the fields of health, of social welfare, as well as in the professions recently opened to women, such as engineering and architecture", also indicating which specialized agencies and other organizations should be invited to co-operate. The memorandum had been circulated in document E/CN.6/L.189 and given limited distribution because the Secretariat was aware that the information presented was far from complete. It had been found very difficult to determine whether a full study was either possible or even desirable.

A sample list of publications from a limited number of countries had been provided in the annex. For health and social welfare they had been found to be numerous but there was little on engineering and architecture. The comments of the ILO, WHO and UNESCO were to be found in section 4 of the memorandum.

Miss ROBB (International Federation of University Women), speaking at the invitation of the CHAIRMAN, said that following the Commission's request at its previous session, her Federation had obtained information from its Associations in the United States, Belgium, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and the Philippines, a summary of which had

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<sup>1)</sup> see: E/2727, para. 167. II. 3. a)

been submitted in document E/CN.6/NGO/36. Since that paper had been written, further interesting material had come in from the associations of university women in the Philippines and Norway, which reinforced the general conclusions already reached. The information had been supplied in reply to the following questions: were women entering the professions of engineering and architecture in relatively large numbers? what training was required? what correlation was there between employment opportunities and the number of students studying for those professions? and, finally, what publications existed bearing on the outlook for women in those professions?

Although the information obtained was tentative and the figures approximate, four points emerged clearly. First, in nearly all the countries covered, women had had for at least thirty years full and equal access to training for and entrance to those two professions. Secondly, both professions nevertheless remained essentially pioneer ones since the number of women training for or practising in them remained exceedingly small. Thirdly, while more women had entered those two professions, the rate of increase had been far from spectacular, and in some cases the numbers had remained stationary for several years. Finally, it was clear that in nearly all the countries concerned the demand for architects and engineers was very great, although in some instances not quite as marked as during the immediate post-war years.

It remained to find an explanation of why women were being slow in taking advantage of the equal opportunities offered to them, when they were entering other highly skilled professions in increasing numbers. One of the reasons was that the training required was of a high standard and lasted for at least five years, yet it was not longer than that for other professions which women had joined in far greater numbers. Another reason was the persistent idea in many communities that engineering and architecture were not suitable professions for women. Finally, there was some confusion in the public mind as to the demands made on physical strength by engineering.

In view of the high demand for women in those two professions and their relatively small response to that demand, expert vocational guidance was obviously needed, beginning at the secondary school level.

In the less economically developed countries, women might join those two professions in greater numbers and more rapidly. The technical assistance



programme might be expected to reveal and to generate an even greater need for architects and engineers throughout the world, as well as itself providing opportunities for them.

Further discussion of item 7 (a) was deferred until the following meeting.

The CHAIRMAN invited the Commission to consider the joint draft resolution (E/CN.6/L.200) submitted by the delegations of France, Indonesia, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Yugoslavia.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) pointed out that the draft resolution emphasized a previous resolution of the Economic and Social Council (587 F III (XX)), and was intended by those delegations to express the great importance which they attached to the subject.

Miss ROESAD (Indonesia) said it was important to ascertain from governments the measures they had taken in pursuance of the Council's resolution 587 F III (XX). She believed the joint draft resolution would command unanimous support.

Mrs. SPIRIDONOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that she had no further comments on the important subject dealt with in the joint draft resolution which she hoped would be generally acceptable.

Mrs. MITROVIĆ (Yugoslavia) said that enough time had elapsed since the adoption of resolution 587 F III (XX) to ask governments what legislative and other measures they had taken to remove economic discrimination against women, one of the most important problems before the Commission.

Mrs. CISELET (Belgium) understood the draft resolution to apply to all cases of discrimination which might affect women, married or unmarried, in their economic activities. In some countries women were obliged to resign their posts on marriage. That practice could not be tolerated, either in public or in private employment. The draft resolution ought therefore to be interpreted quite generally; and she asked for the assurance of the sponsors that such was their intention.

Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) considered it desirable and consistent with the Commission's previous action to remind governments of the urgent need to implement resolution 587 F III (XX). She therefore fully supported the draft resolution.

Miss ROESAD (Indonesia) replied in the affirmative to the Belgian representative's question. The object of the draft resolution was to remove all forms of economic discrimination against women.

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America) asked that further consideration of the draft resolution be deferred until the following meeting.

It was so agreed.

The CHAIRMAN suggested that, in the meantime, the draft resolution should also be submitted to the Resolutions Committee for consideration.

It was so agreed.

## 2. ORDER OF BUSINESS

The CHAIRMAN recalled that the consideration of sub-item (e) had been postponed until later in the session because the joint report on opportunities for girls in vocational and technical education by UNESCO and the ILO (E/CN.6/280) was not available in all working languages. It was still not available in French and she had no information as to the date at which the French text would arrive. Under these circumstances, and unless the Commission, and in particular delegates working in French, felt that they were prepared to take part in the discussion without having the documentation in their language, she would suggest the postponement of consideration of sub-item (e) until the next session. She would also remind the Commission of the fact that the draft of the report in English had only reached the UN Secretariat on 30 January 1956.

Mrs. CISELET (Belgium) considered that the item should be postponed until the next session.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) did not wish it to be said that the absence of a French text was the only obstacle preventing the discussion of that important subject at the present session. It seemed that the Commission already had a heavy enough programme of work before it for the remainder of the session to warrant deferment of item 7 (e) as suggested by the Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN stated that, in view of the size of the report and of the importance of the subject, it seemed preferable to defer its consideration until the eleventh session.

It was so agreed.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.