Item 9 of the provisional agenda

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


The Secretary-General has received the following statement to be distributed to the World Conference of the International Women's Year in conformity with rule 54 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Conference.
OBSTACLES TO THE ATTAINMENT OF EQUALITY OF WOMEN AND MEN

1. Fourteen international non-governmental organizations in 1973 jointly submitted to the twenty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women a statement on International Women's Year entitled Obstacles to the Attainment of Equality of Men and Women. (E/CN.6/NGO/249 and Add.1). This document is a tabulation of obstacles identified by government-appointed participants to a number of United Nations seminars; these were held in various regions of the world, under the advisory services in the field of human rights.

2. The most serious obstacle cited within this document is the persistence of certain traditional attitudes. This underlying obstacle impedes progress in eliminating all others, primarily illiteracy, lack of general education, inadequate vocational training, and non-participation in decision-making within the family and in the community. Concerted, action-oriented programmes to combat negative attitudes should be developed at every level.

3. That attitudes are more difficult to change than laws is generally acknowledged especially by persons engaged in combating discrimination on the basis of race, creed, language, or religion. According to social psychologists the more extreme and well-established the attitude the harder it is to change, and the more central a belief, the more it will resist change. Limiting attitudes toward women are both central and well-established. It is said further that discriminatory treatment begins in the home, and is reinforced in school, religious institutions, and society in general. The tragic result of this is that women themselves "internalize" and perpetuate an image of inferiority.

4. The mass media can be a powerful aid in changing attitudes. This fact has been recognized by the Commission on the Status of Women in its valuable ongoing study of the Influence of Mass Media on the Formulation of a New Attitude Towards the Role of Women in Present Day Society (E/CN.6/581). The announcement that the Government of Australia will host a seminar in November 1975 on Women, the Media and the Arts, is warmly welcomed.

5. Religious institutions too are potential allies in the effort to change traditional attitudes. One interdenominational organization, for example, recently held a world-wide consultation called "Sexism in the 1970's".

6. Programmes adapted to the needs of different countries should concentrate on specific problems in areas such as health, education (women are the chief victims of illiteracy), nutrition, child care, civic and political training, and vocational counselling and training.

7. In the area of work both inside and outside the family, traditional stereotypes of "women's work" and "men's work" should be discarded. Women in a world of rapid technological change should be taught new skills, otherwise they will continue to be relegated to the arduous menial, poorly paid jobs that men do not want. As a participant at one United Nations seminar observed: the gap in the future will be between the trained and the untrained of either sex.

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8. It cannot be too often repeated that the motivation for development and the integration of women in development, must rest primarily on the principles of human rights and social justice rather than on an attempt to raise a country's gross national product, otherwise women will remain the victims of continued exploitation.

9. International Women's Year should mark the beginning of a positive process wherein woman takes the initiative to achieve the equality promised her in numerous pronouncements including the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.