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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN TUESDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER 1995

The second day of the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) found delegates turning their attention to the substantive work of the Conference: negotiating the draft Platform for Action and the Declaration. The Main Committee met during a morning session to adopt the reports from the contact group on the definition of gender and the informal consultations. Two Working Groups were established, and met during the afternoon to begin removing brackets from text related to health and human rights. The Plenary met during the morning and afternoon to hear statements under Agenda Item 8, General Exchange of Views.

MAIN COMMITTEE

Patricia Licuanan (Philippines), Chair of the Main Committee, opened the meeting and updated delegates on work that has been done since the PrepCom during the 39th session of the CSW. ECOSOC authorized a week of informal consultations, which were held from 31 July to 4 August in New York. The results of the informal consultations are contained in A/CONF.177/L.3, and represent a one-third reduction in bracketed text to be discussed here.

Delegates then elected the Bureau. The three Vice-Chairs are Irene Freudenschuss-Reichl (Austria), Zelmira Regazolli (Argentina) and Natalya Drozd (Belarus). The Rapporteur is Selma Ashipala (Namibia).

The Chair then presented the report of the Contact Group on the definition of gender (A/CONF.177/L.2) for adoption. Guatemala stated that she had not agreed with the "non-definition" reached by the Contact Group, and proposed defining gender as referring to male and female as the two sexes of the human being. Malta noted that the issue had been resolved in the Contact Group. The Chair accepted Malta's intervention as the opinion of the group, and closed discussion on the definition. The Holy See accepted the Chair's ruling, but noted that reservations could be stated at the end of the Conference. Benin agreed.

The Main Committee then considered the report on the informal consultations (A/CONF.177/L.3). A number of delegations questioned discrepancies between their consultation notes and the official record. The Secretariat suggested that corrections to such texts be considered in the working groups. The document was adopted subject to technical corrections.

The Committee adopted Item 6 of the provisional agenda, Organization of Work, including the Establishment of the Main Committee (A/CONF.177/3). The Chair invited Nana Ama Yeboa (Ghana) to chair Working Group I, and Irene Freudenschuss-Reichl (Austria) to chair Working Group II. The results of working group deliberations will be issued in a non-paper, in English, for adoption by the Main Committee. Ground rules for negotiation are: avoid position statements and concentrate on resolution of brackets; avoid re-opening agreed text; working group non-papers will be subject to technical corrections only; use agreed language from other UN conferences; and no new issues are to be introduced. Delegations raised questions about document translation facilities and which other UN conference documents are to inform Platform text. The Chair stated that the working groups should decide from which UN documents to draw agreed language.

WORKING GROUP I

Working Group I, chaired by Nana Ama Yeboa (Ghana), convened to negotiate Chapter IV, Section C (health), during an afternoon session.

In paragraph 91 (definition of women's health), the EU replaced a reference to inequality as "the" major barrier to women's health with "a" major barrier. The Holy See, supported by Sudan, Mexico and Canada, proposed replacing a reference to inequality "among women" with language from the IPCD, adding references to different geographical regions, social classes and indigenous and ethnic groups.

In paragraph 94 (factors contributing to unequal access), Yemen proposed a reference to family and marital relations. The Holy See agreed to remove brackets around a reference to the limited power women have over their sexual and reproductive lives, after Cuba, supported by Jamaica, the EU and others, noted that the text had been previously agreed in Cairo. A bracketed reference to the right of women to control their own fertility

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别谈废话

provoked a long discussion. Suriname, supported by Zaire, the US and others, proposed accepting the text, but the Holy See and others preferred “ability” to “right.” Argentina suggested deleting the bracketed text on the grounds that the FWCW does not have a mandate to determine rights. Ecuador could not accept an enshrinement of a right that is not in its legislation. Israel noted that this right is already enshrined in CEDAW. No agreement was reached, and the Holy See suggested sending the text to a contact group.

In paragraph 95 (access to nutrition and health), no decision was reached on bracketed language on counselling and access to confidential sexual and reproductive information and services. The EU said privacy and a reference to parental responsibility could not be linked, due to issues such as sexual abuse. The Holy See, citing ICPD, supported the reference to parents. Some delegations objected to “services.” Chair Yeboa announced the formation of a contact group to examine the chapter on health. The first meeting, chaired by Mervat Tallawy (Egypt), met Tuesday evening.

WORKING GROUP II

Chair Irene Freudenschuss-Reichl (Austria) opened Working Group II and its consideration of Chapter IV (Strategic Objectives and Actions), Section I (human rights).

In paragraph 219 (*de jure* human rights), delegates accepted the alternative developed during the informal consultations and removed brackets from *de jure*. A decision on the reference to “sexual orientation” in paragraph 226 (barriers to enjoyment of human rights), was deferred after several delegates requested a definition of the term and/or suggested deleting it. The US and Canada, among others, supported the term, noting that the reference granted no new rights but stated that some face additional barriers because they belong to a certain group. Delegates agreed to remove brackets around the reference to “feminist groups” in paragraph 228 (defense of human rights).

In sub-paragraph 230 (a) (ratify human rights treaties), delegates agreed to call on nations to “work actively towards” ratification. In 230(b) (ratification of CEDAW), the EU, Paraguay and others, said “consider” should be removed to strengthen the commitment. Sudan reserved, noting that each member State has the right to consider a treaty. The EU, supported by Ghana, Namibia, Canada and others, recommended text combining 230(c) and (d) (limiting reservations to CEDAW). Kuwait, Libya and Iran said both paragraphs should be deleted. The proposal will be circulated in writing. In 230(f) (establishing human rights institutions), Cuba, Malaysia and the G77/China said “independent” should be deleted, because the language was not agreed at Vienna. Australia and Canada said recent General Assembly and Commission on Human Rights resolutions called for “effective, independent and pluralistic institutions.” Kuwait proposed keeping “independent.” Mexico presented text from intersessional informal negotiations for 230(k) (protocol regarding eliminating discrimination), which will be circulated in writing.

In sub-paragraph 231(h) (UNHCR and UNCHR), Canada and the EU supported the original text, stating that its focus on refugees was appropriate. The G-77/China proposed a number of changes to the alternative text, which identified a number of situations that can jeopardize human rights. Delegates agreed to remove the calls to simply “consider” reviewing and revoking laws in sub-paragraph 232(d) (ensure implementation of human

rights instruments). A number of delegates, including Morocco and Argentina, wanted to delete 232(f) (ensure reproductive and sexual rights), while others, including Namibia and Jamaica, urged retaining the language. Jordan pointed out that, in marriage, an Islamic woman has sexual rights, but Malta stated that this did not satisfy its concerns. In 232(h) (prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation), the US supported the text, stating that it only asked countries to consider what may be done to prevent discrimination. Jordan expressed concern that the text established a new right. The brackets around [judges] were removed in 232 (m) (right to legal-related professions).

IN THE CORRIDORS I

After a slow start during negotiations on the health section Tuesday, the Bureau and delegations are placing their hopes in the chair of the Contact Group, Mervat Tallawy from Egypt, the country that hosted the ICPD. Delegates offered a number of explanations for the lack of progress. A European delegate noted the importance of ICPD and the shifting priorities and language of the women’s movement. An African delegate complained that the Arabic translation of the Platform presented a milder version of the proposals. She also noted her country’s aversion to the content of Cairo. The apparent failure of the G-77 to reach a common position also contributed to the lack of progress.

IN THE CORRIDORS II

As evident from the Main Committee’s morning discussion, the debate regarding which previous UN agreements and conferences take precedence will shape some of the unresolved areas in the Programme for Action. Attempts to use the most appropriate agreed language could leave delegates arguing which meeting’s text is best and claiming priority because their preferred alternative came from a summit, or more recent, or well-attended meeting. One example of a possible “Cairo vs. Copenhagen” debate is in the area of parental rights, where some say the ICPD took a tougher stand than did the Social Summit.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: The Plenary will continue to hear statements under Agenda Item 8, General Exchange of Views, in Convention Hall No. 1 of the BICC during morning and afternoon sessions. An evening session is expected.

WORKING GROUP I: The Working Group is expected to meet in Convention Hall No. 16 during morning and afternoon sessions to discuss Chapter V (institutional arrangements).

CONTACT GROUP OF WORKING GROUP I: The Contact Group will meet in Convention Hall No. 10 during a morning session, and in Convention Hall No. 16 from 8:00 to 11:00 pm to discuss Chapter IV, Section C (health).

WORKING GROUP II: The Working Group is expected to meet in Convention Hall No. 15 for both morning and afternoon sessions, during which it will continue discussion of Chapter IV, Section I (human rights) and then begin the Declaration.

NGO BRIEFING: To organize NGO lobbying efforts at the FWCW, there will be a daily morning meeting, from 8:00 to 9:30 am, consisting of three parts: a UN briefing from the Secretariat; a logistics briefing; and the Linkages Caucus. The meetings are being organized by a team of NGOs called “Equipo,” which consists of representatives from NGO caucuses and networks.