Fifteenth special session
Agenda items 9, 13 and 14

REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE PRESENT INTERNATIONAL SITUATION,
especially in the light of the vital objective of terminating the
arms race and the pressing need to achieve substantial
progress in the field of disarmament

CONSIDERATION OF THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE FIELD
OF DISARMAMENT AND OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE DISARMAMENT
MACHINERY

UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE
FIELD OF DISARMAMENT, INCLUDING MEASURES TO MOBILIZE WORLD
PUBLIC OPINION IN FAVOUR OF DISARMAMENT

Programmes and activities undertaken by the United Nations
system in the area of women and peace

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report has been prepared in accordance with paragraph 4 of
Economic and Social Council resolution 1988/28 of 26 May 1988, in which the Council
requested the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifteenth
special session, the third special session devoted to disarmament, on programmes
and activities undertaken by the United Nations system in the area of women and
peace, in particular those activities related to the implementation of the
Declaration on the Participation of Women in Promoting International Peace and
Co-operation (Assembly resolution 37/63 of 3 December 1982, annex) and the Nairobi
Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. 1/

2. The main objective of the United Nations is to ensure lasting peace and to
save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. This objective, as well as
such goals as social and economic development, progress in human rights, justice
and human dignity, cannot be achieved while the very survival of humanity is
threatened by potential nuclear holocaust, while expenditure on arms distorts
economies, and while thousands of women, men and children are dying because of
armed conflict, famine and disease.
3. Such a situation seriously affects women as a specifically vulnerable and traditionally disadvantaged group. Inevitably women are affected by armed conflict, sometimes as combatants but more often as victims. They are deprived of resources for development and of opportunities for full participation in the social, political and economic life of their societies. This affects not only women but even more the societies, which cannot benefit from women's experience and their often different approaches to peace and disarmament issues as well as to resolution of conflicts in non-violent ways.

4. Consequently, the issues of the advancement of women cannot be separated from those of peace and co-operation, and the status of women can only be improved in conditions of stability and harmonious global development, which are inseparably linked to disarmament.

5. In recent years those factors have mobilized many women throughout the world to participate in all forms of promotion of peace and disarmament. They also set the framework for the major activities of the United Nations with regard to women and peace. Those activities have been placed in the context of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (1976-1985) and have been based on the assumption that the three objectives of the Decade are interrelated and mutually reinforcing so that the achievement of one might considerably facilitate the achievement of another. Consequently, on the one hand, peace cannot be realized under conditions of economic and sexual inequality, threat of nuclear holocaust, denial of basic human rights and unequal development, and, on the other hand, the lack of peace will prevent or distort development since positive social change cannot occur in conditions of increasing arms expenditures and militarization.

6. One of the most important achievements of the Decade with regard to women and peace was the unanimous adoption of the Declaration on the Participation of Women in Promoting International Peace and Co-operation by the General Assembly in 1982. Although the Declaration is not legally binding, it constitutes the first comprehensive United Nations declaration focusing exclusively on the issue of women and peace, listing the major areas of concern and calling upon Governments and governmental and non-governmental organizations for action. Therefore, since its adoption, the issue of the implementation of the Declaration has been considered at national and international levels, culminating in the preparation by the Secretary-General of the report on his subject (A/42/516) and its submission to the Assembly at its forty-second session.

7. The 1985 Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies also broadly addressed these issues. They reinforced concerns in the area of women, peace and disarmament that have long preoccupied the international community and also identified new priorities. The strategies emphasize the need for women to participate in the decision-making processes related to peace and disarmament and specify that women should take part in peace-making processes and disarmament negotiations from the grass-roots level to the highest levels. To become more effective in this field, women should be properly trained and educated. They should be encouraged to develop self-reliance and leadership capabilities to enter the diplomatic service and the international civil service and to strengthen their role in peace and disarmament research and the education of societies for life in peace.

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8. The many ideas contained in the Forward-looking Strategies need to be further analysed and discussed throughout the world at national, regional and international levels with a view to their implementation. The fifteenth special session seems to provide a unique occasion for such analysis and discussion.

9. Within the United Nations the substantive unit responsible for the implementation of the Forward-looking Strategies and other mandates of the subprogramme of the medium-term plan entitled "Participation of women in promoting international peace and co-operation" is the Branch for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Office at Vienna/Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. Some of the Branch's activities concentrate on the promotion of peace and women's role therein. They have included preparation of the development education kit on "Women and Peace: Equality, Participation, Development", which strongly addresses the issue of women and disarmament, dissemination of documents and information on the subject, participation in meetings and seminars, and preparation of publications.

10. Other activities of the Branch include organization of expert group meetings and preparation of analytical papers, reports and case studies that represent the research aspect of the Branch's programmes. For example, the 1983 expert group meeting on the topic "Participation of women in promoting international peace and co-operation", which was held at Vienna, focused on such issues as the role of women in disarmament, education for peace, peace research and non-governmental activities. A report entitled "Access to information and education for peace" (E/CN.6/1988/5) was prepared for the Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-second session, held in 1988. However, the comprehensive study programme on the participation of women in decision-making processes with regard to peace and disarmament seems to be of a special importance.

11. Although the situation is gradually improving, women are not usually part of national and international decision-making bodies that discuss issues involving the arms race, war and peace, such as the fifteenth special session. This not only deprives women of their basic rights to participate in decisions that are crucial for humanity, but also deprives society of women's perspective and experience, without which the active political process remains incomplete. With this in mind, the Commission on the Status of Women in 1987 selected as priority themes in the area of "Peace" for its future sessions the topics "Full participation of women in the construction of their countries and in the creation of just social and political systems" (1989) and "Equal participation in all efforts to promote international co-operation, peace and disarmament" (1992). The Branch has undertaken a number of case studies aimed at reflecting the status of women's participation in selected countries of different regions and in regional negotiations, such as a study on the participation of women in the 1986 Vienna meeting of representatives of the participating States of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and a study on the participation of women in the talks on mutual reduction of armed forces and armaments and associated measures in Central Europe. On the basis of such research, possible measures for improvement will be proposed.
12. Other aspects of the issue of women and peace that have not yet been taken into account will be given attention within the framework of the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1995. Some of them require special consideration, among which the following:

(a) Studies on the potential benefits of the disarmament process to the advancement of women;

(b) Preparation of studies on the relationship between the goals of peace and disarmament and that of equality and development;

(c) Measures aimed at increasing the number of women in the fields of foreign policy, international negotiations, resolution of conflicts and eradication of all forms of violence.

13. In addition to those activities, the Branch for the Advancement of Women closely co-operates with other bodies of the United Nations system within the framework of women for peace and in accordance with their respective mandates. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as the lead agency in the area of education for peace and education for disarmament, addressed the issue of the participation of women in education for peace in its programme XIII.3 entitled "Education for peace and respect for human rights and the rights of people". UNESCO has also contributed to many meetings and projects promoting the importance of the role of women in education for peace, such as the General Conference of International Peace Research Associations, a round-table for the celebration of the International Year of Peace (April 1986) and the Associated School Project and the Conference on the Mobilization of Rural Youth for the Promotion of Peace, Disarmament and Development, held in Ghana in 1986. In the biennium 1988-1989, UNESCO will give special attention to the access of women to education for peace on the basis of new mandates provided by the General Conference at its twenty-third session, held in 1985.

14. The issue of women and peace can also be incorporated in programmes and activities of other relevant United Nations bodies, for example, within the programme of education for peace, human rights and international peace of the University for Peace, the World Disarmament Campaign organized by the Department for Disarmament Affairs and the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat and United Nations University programmes on "peace, security, conflict resolutions and global transformation" and "human and social development and co-existence of people, cultures and social system".

15. These opportunities should be further explored in accordance with the intention of the Secretary-General to take advantage of the momentum generated by this session and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies.
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