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RESULTS OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN IN CMEA MEMBER COUNTRIES

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In 1985 the countries and peoples of the world sum up the results of the UN Decade for Women (1976–1985). Its motto – Equality – Development – Peace – reflects major problems of the situation of women in today's world. By decision of the 37th Session of the UN General Assembly, a UN World Conference is held in Nairobi (Kenya) to give an evaluation of the progress made in different countries of the world during the past ten years in implementing the aims and tasks of the Decade for Women and also major documents adopted during the Decade, such as the World Plan of Action and the Declaration (Mexico City, 1975) and the Programme of Action for the second half of the Decade (Copenhagen, 1980).

As the CMEA member countries entered the Decade for Women they had the world's most advanced legislation on women's equality. Its practical implementation is guaranteed by actual socio-economic conditions in socialist countries, including the broad involvement of women in the process of social production, improvements in women's everyday life that enable them to combine harmoniously participation in socially useful labour with family duties. Legal guarantees for the rights of women and really existing opportunities for their implementation in the CMEA member countries go beyond the relevant provisions of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women¹.

The thirty six years since the establishment of the CMEA, the world's first interstate organization of socialist countries, have seen the immediate and active participation of women in building socialism and communism, and a steady growth of their role in all spheres of social life. Success of

¹ Adopted at the 34th Session of the UN General Assembly in 1979. CMEA member countries were among the first to ratify this Convention.

the CMEA member countries in this field is a logical result of the purposeful socio-economic policy pursued by them at every stage of building socialism.

For the CMEA member countries, the period of 1976–1985 was marked by further improvements in constitutional legislation, by the consolidation and development of the system of social guarantees that determine real equality of women in all spheres of the social life, by the growth of their labour and social activity, by the strengthening of the family and by a rise of its role in the development of society.

The principle of equality of woman and man in the economic, political and social life is laid down in the Constitutions of socialist countries and is secured through granting women and men equal opportunities in education and vocational training, in participation in social labour, in social and cultural activity, and also through special measures to ensure health care for women engaged in production and through creating conditions that enable women to combine socially useful work with maternity.

Care for women in socialist society is an integral aspect of governmental socio-economic policies. As concrete socio-economic tasks have been tackled and long-term plans made at every stage of building socialism, care has been taken further to enhance the role of woman in society. Socialism alone leads to the complete social emancipation of woman and to the creation of preconditions for her all-round development as an equal member of society and the family.

In turn, active participation of women in the productive, social and political activity and, the development of their creative forces and capabilities are an important factor of speeding up social progress.

Despite the remaining differences in their socio-economic development levels and, consequently, in the degree to which problems of the situation of women have been resolved in them, the socialist community countries set before themselves common tasks predetermined by the nature of the socialist formation.

The expanding co-operation of the CMEA member countries and the development of socialist economic integration that have become a major factor of progress in every socialist country and the community as a whole facilitate the speeding up of processes of all-round drawing closer together of socialist countries, including the evening out of the development levels, of the system of social guarantees that predetermine woman's situation in society. General ways and methods of solving problems that emerge in this field are becoming clearer. At the same time every socialist country has its own specific features and its own experience in solving the women's question.

The CMEA member countries have a large economic potential: they generate roughly one-third of the world's industrial output and one-fourth of its national income. As a result of the economic development level achieved

by the socialist community countries, objective conditions have been provided for a better social orientation of social production.

In 1976–1985, despite aggravated external and domestic economic conditions and certain difficulties and discrepancies in national economic development, the economic, scientific and technological potentials of socialist countries have continued to grow stronger. On this basis significant social programmes have been implemented, the well-being of the peoples has been improved, and education, science, culture and public health have continued to make progress. Capital investments in the non-production sphere have increased and the volume of retail trade turnover and the services has grown. Another step has been taken on the path to social homogeneity in society and the incomes and working and living conditions of different social groups of the population have markedly drawn nearer. During these years the socio-economic development of the socialist community countries, has proceeded, as before, under conditions of full employment.

Payments from social consumption funds, which play an important role in securing *de facto* equality of woman and man in socialist society, have kept growing at a high rate. Social consumption funds represent a part of the total consumption fund of socialist society and are used to meet some social needs free or at cut rates and to make special cash payments. Social consumption funds, which are managed by the state, are one of the major social achievements of socialist countries. Various payments, benefits and services from these funds constitute one-fourth to one-third of the real incomes of the population in the European CMEA member countries. Thanks to the social consumption funds and to state capital investments in the non-production sphere, real socialism has a well-developed system of social security, assistance to families, free health care and education, and a broad network of cultural and educational establishments accessible to all.

The constant economic growth of socialist countries is an objective basis for solving all the problems essential to woman's situation in society.

Participation in socially useful work is the main factor determining the real role and situation of woman in society.

The right to work proclaimed and stipulated in the Constitutions of the CMEA member countries means not only the right to a job but to pay in accordance with the quantity and quality of work done, and not below the minimum established by the state. It includes also the right to choose profession or trade in accordance with one's calling, capabilities, education and with due account for the needs of society.

The CMEA member countries have achieved a high level of women's employment in social production. The share of women among workers and employees is 40 to 50 per cent and more. In some branches of the non-production sphere, such as education, public health, culture, the arts, social security and trade, women's labour is prevailing. At present the CMEA

member countries have practically achieved 100 per cent employment of the able-bodied population, including women, in socially useful work.

Under socialism with its characteristic relations of social equality and collectivism, social labour helps increase the occupational and social activity of women and their development as a personality, and ensures their economic independence, without which their real equality with men is practically impossible. However, women can make use of their right to work to the maximum degree only if proper conditions are provided in society and the family to enable women to combine socially useful work with family duties. The improvement of these conditions is one of the basic aspects of the socio-economic policies of the Communist and Workers' Parties and governments of the CMEA member countries.

General guidelines for measures to create and improve conditions for women to reconcile their social, production and family duties are as follows:

— the development of a system of public establishments to bring up preschool and school-aged children (kindergartens, nurseries, prolonged-day groups at schools, young pioneer and sports camps, young pioneer houses, young technicians' centers, etc.). At present about one-half of preschool children in most of the CMEA member countries attend child-care centers, with parents paying only a part of the upkeep costs;

— the development of a nationwide system of services that make it easier for women and the family as a whole to manage their households. In recent years factories and offices employing women have been playing an ever larger role in providing conditions for them to reconcile their family duties and work in production. As the economic mechanism is improved, enterprises become more self-sufficient, social funds grow, and the rights of enterprises to use them are broadened. The systems of in-factory public catering and everyday services created in the majority of the CMEA member countries lessens the burden of the second, "household work shift" on women and releases time for bringing up children, for greater participation in the social life and for the all-round development of the personality;

— the development and improvement of mother-and-child care. Legislation on labour protection for women in the CMEA member countries entitles them to paid maternity leaves, prohibits their employment in harmful jobs, envisions more favourable retirement conditions for them and also extend privileges to working mothers;

— a further rise in financial assistance to families upon the birth of children and in their upbringing and improvements in the forms of such assistance. In 1976–1985 more CMEA member countries have granted women partially paid leaves until their children reach a certain age¹, the size

¹ One to three years in different countries.

of allowances to families with children has increased, especially to families with many children;

— introduction of flexible forms of employment for women with children;

— forming of public opinion and intensification of educational work among the population with a view to a fairer distribution of duties in the family and to raising the social prestige of the family.

Family issues rank high in the social and economic policies of the socialist community countries. In recent years they have been tackled in a more comprehensive manner embracing every aspect of the family life. A broad range of economic, social, organizational and educational measures are used in this field.

In particular, the CMEA member countries are constantly developing and improving their system of care for young families. In a number of countries newly-weds enjoy priority in getting housing. Besides, young families can draw easy credits to build homes and buy household goods. As a rule, these credits, depending on the number of children born, are partially or fully repaid by the state.

In some CMEA member countries commissions for women's labour, living conditions and mother-and-child care are acting among other standing deputies commissions in the framework of the supreme governmental bodies. In other countries these matters are tackled by special governmental coordinating committees.

The improvement of the system of general education and occupational training and its modification in line with today's needs of social and economic development play a special role in the complex of social problems tackled in the CMEA member countries.

Matters related to the improvement of the educational system at all levels have always been in the focus of attention of the Communist and Workers' Parties and governments of the CMEA member countries. At present the European CMEA member countries have completed or are about to complete transition to compulsory secondary education. The higher and specialized secondary schools have reached a level at which they on the whole meet the needs of the national economies in trained labour.

The right to education and to the choice of occupation or trade is stipulated in the Constitutions of socialist countries. Educational opportunities are not in the least restricted on the grounds of sex. Young men and women are trained according to integrated curricula in all educational establishments. Women can be trained in any profession or trade. On the whole, women constitute about one half of the student population in all the age groups and at every level of education in the CMEA member countries. All this creates conditions for complete equality between women and men in choosing occupation or trade.

At the same time childbirth and upbringing force most women temporarily to drop out (completely or partially) of production and social activity. This circumstance is the main cause of a lower general professional and occupational standards of women as compared with men in a number of cases (despite identical educational standards). It also hampers women's professional careers and progress in society. That is why special attention is paid in the CMEA member countries to improving the occupational skills of women. There are many forms of this work, from a flexible system of specialized advanced training and retraining courses for women to the full-time training of women with little children while their wages and salaries are paid in full.

A characteristic feature of the socio-economic and political development of the CMEA member countries at the present stage is the further perfection of socialist democracy and the broad involvement of all the members of society in management, important decision-making and follow-up control. Women take a more and more active part in various processes of the administration of social affairs.

V.I. Lenin repeatedly noted the importance of women's involvement in administration and stressed the need to create proper conditions for any woman to participate creatively and efficiently in running the state.

A graphic example of social and political activity of women in socialist society is their broad representation in the bodies of government at all levels. At present 27 to 50 per cent or more deputies to the local bodies of government in socialist countries are women. Women also are broadly represented in the supreme bodies of government. They are members of Supreme Courts and the leading bodies of trade unions and other mass organizations. Participating in the work of these bodies whose powers and functions are being constantly enlarged women exert a great influence on the formulation and implementation of policies in the key areas of building socialism.

An important indicator of the socio-political activity of women is their growing membership of political parties and participation in the work of leading party bodies at various levels.

Millions of women in the CMEA member countries are trained in the administration of social and state affairs through participation in the work of social and political organizations and governmental agencies.

The social and political activity of women in socialist countries is also manifest in their participation in important political decision-making on the most urgent problems of our day, such as the safeguarding of peace and the prevention of nuclear war. Women of socialist countries are doing a good deal to popularize the foreign policy of peace, pursued by these countries, among women in other countries and to make as many people as possible

aware that the policy of peace meets the vital interests of not only the peoples of socialist countries but of all the peoples in the world.

Women of socialist countries initiate many antiwar actions and take an active part in the UN World Campaign for Disarmament. Their concerted and purposeful actions for peace are fully in accord with the motto of the UN Decade for Women, Equality — Development — Peace, and with the letter and the spirit of major international documents adopted during the Decade, and aimed at securing the right of women and all the other people of the world to live in peace. These documents include the above-mentioned World Plan of Action (Mexico City, 1975) and the Programme of Action for the second half of the Decade (Copenhagen, 1980), and also the Declaration of the Participation of Women in Promoting International Peace and Co-operation, adopted by the 37th Session of the UN General Assembly (1982). These documents stress that the creation of conditions for ensuring a lasting peace, detente, disarmament and international security depends on the equal participation of men and women in the struggle for the achievement of these goals. Broad support for these documents by women in different countries shows that women are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that without peace there can be neither development, nor social progress, nor women's equality, nor life itself.

The UN Decade for Women has been marked by an unprecedentedly large-scale women's international antiwar movement. Women strongly protest against the imperialist forces' course of escalating the arms race, inflating military budgets and cutting back social spending.

Now that the international situation has been dramatically aggravated, women in socialist countries consider it their urgent task to promote in every way the development of the international antiwar movement. They take an active part in campaigns to collect signatures under peace petitions, raise funds for peace and solidarity actions, hold meetings and dialogues on problems of peace efforts, and participate in peace marches. They consider help and support to women in the countries fighting for national independence, freedom and democracy to be a form of struggle for a stable and just peace on Earth.

Another important area of the activity of women's organizations of socialist countries for peace is the upbringing of the younger generation in the spirit of peace and friendship among peoples, forming of understanding of the social causes of wars in children and youth minds, real ways to achieve peace, and the necessity and possibility of peaceful co-operation of states with different social systems.

The experience of socialist countries in resolving the women's question demonstrates a qualitatively new approach of the ruling Communist and Workers' Parties and governments of these countries to the situation of woman and her role in society, and to society's genuine interest in providing

comprehensive conditions enabling woman to reconcile in a most effective manner her indispensable and great role in the family and active participation on a par with man in productive work, in the social and political life of society, and also to improve her professional and occupational skills and general educational standards. It is only socialist society, free from exploitation of man by man, that is capable of creating optimum conditions for resolving the problem of real equality for women.