



Press Release

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Fifty-eighth General Assembly
Third Committee
15th & 16th Meetings (AM & PM)

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GOVERNMENTS, COMMUNITIES, FAMILIES HAVE DUTY TO BUILD PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN, THIRD COMMITTEE TOLD, AS DEBATE ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS BEGIN

Committee Concludes Discussion of Women's Issues, Hearing 26 Speakers

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Background

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) today is expected to conclude its discussion of women's issues after which it will begin consideration of issues relating to the rights of the child. (For background on women's issues, see Press Release GA/SHC/3744 of 15 October.)

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Statements on Women's Issues

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RANIAAL HAJ ALI (Syria) said her Government's commitment to promoting gender equity and advancing the status of women was evident in its national strategy that focused on increasing the participation of women in Syria's economic and political life. Education was the main way to ensure the advancement of women in society and to meet the challenges of poverty and illiteracy. Therefore, Syria had organized a forum of Arab women that stressed the need for women's education and the participation of Arab women in development. The forum had drafted several recommendations to increase school enrollment of girls as well as access to technical training programmes. Recommendations had also been adopted for rural women to increase their access to education and social services to enable them to participate actively in development.

Syria remained convinced of the need for international cooperation to promote the advancement of women, and this was reflected in its accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Regarding violence against women, she said laws in Syria were very severe concerning crimes affecting women's health and their rights.

She stressed that women's rights must be for all women and not just a few. Equality and freedom for women would not be realized without considering the situation of women in areas under foreign occupation. Syrian and Lebanese women who lived under Israeli occupation had been denied their fundamental rights, including access to health and education services, and were routinely subject to discrimination. Women in Syria would continue to struggle for women in the occupied areas in order to promote full protection of their rights. Until peace was established and occupation eliminated, the advancement of women would be incomplete.

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MINA WESTMAN (Israel) said her country placed gender equality high on its political and social agenda and noted the status of women in Israel had improved significantly in the political sphere. She said the Government currently included three female Ministers and two female Deputy Ministers. Eighteen out of the 120 Members of Parliament were women, marking an increase of more than 20 per cent in parliamentary representation. Israel's commitment to the mainstreaming of a gender perspective was also reflected in the adoption of several laws, backed up by enforcement, to eliminate discrimination against women and to address the issue of violence against women.

She said violence against women was one of the most serious problems facing women in almost every country, noting that 12 per cent of women in Israel suffered from violence. In response to this problem the Government had initiated efforts to increase public awareness and set up facilities to provide support for battered women.

To combat poverty among women, Israel had established a unit within the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to encourage women to open small and medium-sized businesses and to destroy barriers impeding the advancement of women in business. Microloan funds had also been established for women, and women loan recipients were encouraged to participate in entrepreneurship courses. She added that Israel had also held vocational training courses, through the Center for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for hundreds of women trainees around the world, including Palestinian women.

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Action on Proposal By Syria

Before the Committee was a proposal of the representative by Syria, on behalf of the Arab Group, to extend an invitation to the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the occupied territories, John Dugard, to address the Third Committee.

The representative of the United States said his country rejected the proposal and had therefore asked for a vote. The Special Rapporteur had not been authorized to travel to New York to present his report; it was an irresponsible use of scarce resources. The report was available in an advanced unedited version to all delegates. It was a grossly one-sided report, and it did not contribute to human rights or peace in the Middle East.

The representative of Malaysia said the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement had expressed its support of the Palestinian people and of the work of the Special Rapporteur on this issue. Malaysia therefore supported the proposal.

A representative of Pakistan said the Special Rapporteur would make a useful contribution to the work of the Committee under the agenda item and therefore supported the proposal.

The proposal was adopted with a vote of 140 in favour to 2 against (Israel and the United States), with one abstention (Australia) (see Annex).

In a general statement after the vote, the representative of Syria, on behalf of the Arab Group, thanked all States that had supported the request to invite the Special Rapporteur. She added that this support had sent the right signal to the international community as to the Committee's interest in the human rights situation in the occupied territories.

A representative of Cuba said that the invitation was exceptional and was justified by the inability of the Security Council to deal with the deteriorating situation in the territories.

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ANNEX

Vote on Proposal to Invite Special Rapporteur

The proposal by Syria to invite the Special Rapporteur on human rights in the occupied territories to address the Third Committee was approved by a recorded vote of 140 in favour to 2 against, with 1 abstention, as follows:

In favour: Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia and Montenegro, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Thailand, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Timor-Leste, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Against: Israel, United States.

Abstain: Australia.

Absent: Albania, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Gabon, Georgia, Grenada, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mongolia, Nauru, Nepal, Nicaragua, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Moldova, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Suriname, Tajikistan, Tonga, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu.

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