

by political and economic factors such as the critical international economic situation and the consequent adjustment programmes, which in general entail a high social cost. In this context, the economic constraints due in part to the prevailing macro-economic factors have contributed to the aggravation of economic conditions at the national level. Moreover, the devaluation of women's productive and reproductive roles, as a result of which the status of women continued to be regarded as secondary to that of men, and the low priority assigned to promoting the participation of women in development are historical factors that limit women's access to employment, health and education, as well as to other sectoral resources, and to the effective integration of women in the decision-making process. Regardless of gains, the structural constraints imposed by a socio-economic framework in which women are second-class persons still limit progress. Despite changes in some countries to promote equity in all spheres of life, the "double burden" for women of having the major responsibility for domestic tasks and of participating in the labour force remains. For example, several countries in both the developed and developing world identify as a major obstacle the lack of adequate supportive services for working women.

#### Paragraph 19

According to responses from the developing countries, particularly the least developed, to the United Nations questionnaire to Governments (see A/CONF.116/5 and Add.1-14), poverty is on the increase in some countries and constitutes another major obstacle to the advancement of women. The exigencies created by problems of mass poverty, compounded by scarce national resources, have compelled Governments to concentrate on alleviating the poverty of both women and men rather than on equality issues for women. At the same time, because women's secondary position increases their vulnerability to marginalization, those belonging to the lowest socio-economic strata are likely to be the poorest of the poor and should be given priority. Women are an essential productive force in all economies; therefore it is particularly important in times of economic recession that programmes and measures designed to raise the status of women should not be relaxed but rather intensified.

#### Paragraph 20

To economic problems, with their attendant social and cultural implications, must be added the threat to international peace and security resulting from violations of the principles of the United Nations Charter. This situation, affecting inter alia the lives of women, constitutes a most serious obstacle to development and thus hinders the fulfilment of the Forward-looking Strategies.

#### Paragraph 21

What is now needed is the political will to promote development in such a way that the strategy for the advancement of women seeks first and foremost to alter the current unequal conditions and structures that continue to define women as secondary persons and give women's issues a low priority. Development should now move to another plane in which women's pivotal role in society is recognized and given its true value. That will allow women to assume their legitimate and core positions in the strategies for effecting the changes necessary to promote and sustain development.