CANADIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

CAUTION: ADVANCE TEXT

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

PRESS RELEASE No. 34

October 3, 1967

Press Office
866 United Nations Plaza
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New York, N. Y. 10017
PLaza 1-5600

STATUS OF WOMEN

Text of Statement to be made in the Third Committee by the Canadian Representative, Mrs. Sally Merchant, on Tuesday, October 3, 1967.

Before I address myself to the Draft declaration under consideration I would like to express the satisfaction of the Canadian delegation in the fact that a member of the Yugoslavian delegation has assumed the chairmanship of the Third Committee, and to express the delegation's and my own congratulations to you, personally, on your election to that office.

My delegation would also like to be associated with previous distinguished delegates who have paid well deserved tribute to Madame Warzazi who so capably chaired the Third Committee in the 21st Assembly. And may I also express the satisfaction of the Canadian delegation with the Committee's choice of Bureau--and express our confidence in and congratulations to Dr. Nettel of Austria and Mr. Adam Mohammed of Nigeria. The direction and the ultimate accomplishment of the Third Committee inevitably will bear the stamp of the outstanding individuals who offer leadership as it has already profited from the influence of the very eminent people who have participated in time past. As Canadians we take great pride in the contribution that one of our own countrymen has made--Mrs. Adelaide Sinclair is this year retiring after ten years as Deputy Executive Director of Programmes for UNICEF. Mrs. Sinclair's association with the United Nations and its Agencies extends over its entire history first as a Canadian Delegate to UNESCO in 1947; then as Canadian Representative to the UNICEF Board and finally in the capacity from which she now retires. Madam Chairman, I hope you will forgive our very natural pride in the great contribution that this outstanding Canadian woman has made in the field of international understanding and co-operation--and that you will allow me to pay her public tribute here.

Although Canada did not participate in the Commission on the Status of Women, whose deliberations produced the draft declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, we have followed the progress of their work with deep interest and close attention. We regard this draft as a salutary step in the direction indicated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The draft declaration sets forth, with precision, a set of standards for equality between men and women. In the view of my delegation its great importance, as it now stands, is to establish goals that should, and we hope, will, determine a course of action towards equality of status, on the part of all member states in the United Nations.

It is with regret that we must recognize that full political, civil, economic, cultural and educational equality between men and women has not been realized throughout the world--even in those countries where historically, acceptance of the principle of equality is relatively long standing. It is to be hoped that the adoption of the draft declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (though it imposes no binding obligations) might prompt all member nations to give this particular aspect of human rights closer scrutiny than has hitherto been the universal case.

In my own country, women have long enjoyed political equality and equality of educational opportunity--and an increasing degree of economic equality. There are, however, social and cultural attitudes that seek to perpetuate subtle barriers to completely equal status (in all spheres). (It is something of a paradox that women by their own attitude may jeopardize full attainment of status they seek.) It is true also in Canada as may be so to varying degrees in other countries that legislative changes may be required to remove whatever may remain of discrimination against women. At a time when women are an increasing factor in the economy of our country there may be need for new legislation and governmental responsibility. For these and for many other reasons a Royal Commission on Status of Women is at present investigating in Canada these particular areas, and consequently the draft declaration is of particular interest to Canada.

In this matter there are constitutional considerations that arise out of the Canadian federal system of Government. Division of jurisdictional powers necessitates that findings of such a Commission or in fact any commitment undertaken by the Federal Government be submitted to Provincial Governments for implementation of those provisions which fall within their field of competence. My delegation views the declaration, however, as being a very valuable contribution which

we are confident will commend itself to all levels of Government in Canada. We hope, Madam Chairman, that the Draft Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women will find unanimous support in this Committee and that it will subsequently enjoy application in ways best suited to varying national and cultural circumstances of member nations here represented.

The Canadian delegation is in general agreement with the declaration as it now stands. We are however not in disagreement with some of the modifications that have been suggested. But, Madam Chairman, we would like to reserve the right to speak on specific changes as they may arise.