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COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

COM(85) 256 final

Brussels, 30 May 1985

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

on the Community participation in the World Conference to Review and
Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women:
Equality, Development and Peace

COM(85) 256 final

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

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Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations
Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 1975 was proclaimed International Women's Year by the United Nations. The numerous activities surrounding this event culminated in a World Conference in Mexico City where a World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of International Women's Year was adopted. A central point of this Plan was the proclamation of the years 1976 to 1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women./
- 1.2 The already approved themes of the Decade, equality, development and peace, were further enlarged when the UN General Assembly in 1979 adopted three sub-themes, employment, health and education. On this basis, the Mid-Decade Conference, held in Copenhagen in 1980, adopted a Programme of Action for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade for Women.
- 1.3 The World Conference closing the Decade will be held in Nairobi from 13 to 26 July 1985. In order to obtain a general mandate for the Community contribution to the Conference and the UN preparatory process, beginning in 1983, the Commission in 1982 prepared a Communication (1) which was approved by the Council (2), outlining the principle and procedure of the proposed participation, as well as the contents of the position to be adopted by the Community.

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- (1) COM (82) 796 final
(2) Document 4664/83 SOC. 35

1.4 At United Nations level, the World Conference is being prepared by the Commission on the Status of Women which held three special preparatory sessions during the spring of 1983, 1984 and 1985, respectively. At regional level, the Economic Commission for Europe held its own preparatory Seminar in October 1984.

For all these meetings, Community statements were drafted by the Commission Services and adopted by COREPER. These statements were delivered by the Head of the Presidency delegation, the Commission delegate, where appropriate, adding a further statement on behalf of the Community under another agenda item.

Community co-ordination meetings have regularly taken place throughout the preparatory process.

Apart from organising various preparatory meetings, the UN Secretariat also sent a major questionnaire to all its Member State Governments, the replies to which will help them prepare the basic documentation for the World Conference. The Community itself has replied to those parts of the questionnaire falling within its competence.

2. PRINCIPLE AND PROCEDURE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

On 21 February 1983, the Council took the following decision (1), based on the Commission's above mentioned Communication on the World Conference:

- " 1. The Community will participate as such in the Conference.
2. Prior co-ordination in order to define a Community position will be ensured for subjects within Community competence or of Community interest.
3. The Community positions will be submitted in accordance with the rules adopted and already approved by the Permanent Representatives Committee (2) for Community participation in proceedings at the United Nations, where the Community has observer status. These rules are annexed hereto, though it is pointed out that their practical application will be decided during on-the-spot co-ordination.

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(1) Document 4664/83 SOC. 35

(2) See 8757/80 Relex 34, Annex I of which comprises document I/119/74 also annexed hereto.

4. The rules on Community participation will apply throughout the Conference and its preparatory discussions, and will concern the official debates and discussions and informal working parties and negotiations."

This decision retains both its justification and validity. It may be noted in particular that both the European Parliament (1) and the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2) have stressed the importance of effective Community co-ordination at the Conference.

3. CONTENTS OF THE COMMUNITY POSITION

Debates in the World Conference will take place in a plenary session and two working parties. The two main agenda items (review and appraisal/forward-looking strategies) will be shared out as follows between these fora:

- the plenary session will deal with all agenda items, and in particular with the review and appraisal of progress achieved and obstacles encountered in attaining the goals and objectives of the Decade;
- the working parties will discuss forward-looking strategies aimed at the year 2000, one at national level and the other at regional and international levels.

3.1 Review and appraisal of progress achieved and obstacles encountered in attaining the goals and objectives of the United Nations Decade for Women

- 3.1.1 The Community's policy to bring about employment equality for women and men, has been revolutionised during the United Nations Decade for Women. In 1975, at the outset, such a policy was only in the early stages of its conception, and the Community's legislative basis was confined to Article 119 of the EEC Treaty which had then been tested only once in the Court of Justice: the first equal pay case (Defrenne) was decided in 1971.
- 3.1.2 1975 itself saw the adoption of the equal pay directive (Directive 75/117/EEC) (3), which was rapidly followed by directives on equal treatment at work (Directive 76/207/EEC) (4) and equal treatment as regards statutory social security

(1) O.J.C. 127, 14.5.1984, p. 76

(2) In its opinion of 3.4.1984, document no. 42

(3) O.J.L. 45, 19.2.1975, p. 19

(4) O.J.L. 32, 14.1.1976, p. 40

schemes (Directive 79/7/EEC) (1). These directives have meanwhile become part of the national law of the Member States, where they have also served as a stimulus for further action on behalf of women.

3.1.3 In 1981, the Commission submitted to the Council a New Community Action Programme on the Promotion of Equal Opportunities for Women (1982-1985) (2) which besides the commitment to monitor and extend legislation, also contained a broad range of positive actions to enable women to achieve equal opportunities in practice. The Council approved the general objectives of the Action Programme in its Resolution of 12 July 1982 (3) in which it also undertook to implement appropriate measures to attain these objectives.

The Action Programme has now reached the final year of its application. As part of its contribution to the forthcoming World Conference, the Commission will be preparing the report on the implementation of this Programme in time for July 1985.

3.1.4 The Action Programme has given rise to a series of Community efforts on behalf of women. First of all, it proved necessary to safeguard what had already been achieved by ensuring the correct application of the three directives. This was done by the Commission as guardian of the treaties, moreover, with a view to obtaining more information on the implementation in practice of the three existing directives, the Commission set up a contacts network serving as a forum for exchanges of information and for consultation on the application of the existing directives. The Commission also carried out a comparative analysis of the mechanisms and frequency of use of legal redress arrangements provided for under the legislation implementing the three directives, with a view to encouraging workers, if necessary, to avail themselves as fully as possible of their rights.

3.1.5 Three new legal instruments have been submitted by the Commission to the Council:

- a proposal for a directive aimed at equal treatment in occupational social security schemes (4);

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(1) O.J.L 6, 10.1.1979, p. 24)

(2) COM (81) 758 final

(3) O.J.C 186, 21.7.1983, p. 3

(4) O.J.C 1134, 21.5.1983, p. 7

- a proposal for a directive on parental leave and leave for family reasons (1), and
- a proposal for a directive applying the principle of equal treatment to women in self-employed occupations, including agriculture (2).

The Commission has, moreover, been studying income tax systems which appear to have an indirect adverse effect on women's employment, their right to work and their promotion in employment, and submitted a memorandum (3) to the Council, embodying its principal conclusions.

3.1.6. In the area of social security, the Commission has been studying allowances and benefits not covered by Directive 79/7/EEC, with the intention of proposing a further directive progressively providing both women and men with their own social security rights.

3.1.7 In addition to its efforts at the legal and legislative levels, the Community has been active in promoting positive measures to eliminate inequality in practice. Thus, the Council has adopted a recommendation on positive action for women (4) which sets a broad framework for measures to be taken and/or promoted by Member States in order to aid the advancement of women.

The Commission is currently drawing up a code of practice on positive actions for women in employment which could serve as a useful guide for employers or employees anxious to launch a programme of this kind.

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(1) O.J.C 333, 9.12.1983, p. 6

(2) O.J.C 113, 27.4.1984, p. 4

(3) COM (84) 695 final

(4) O.J.L 331, 19.12.1984, p. 34

3.1.8 The Commission attempts to promote the desegregation of employment and, thus, to bring about a more balanced representation of both women and men in all sectors and occupations and at all levels of the occupational hierarchy. This has been done by research-based action projects, launched initially in 1978 in the banking sector and meanwhile expanded into the broadcasting organisations and, most recently, into manufacturing industry. In order to enable women to take on the management of their own business affairs, the Commission has also aided the launching of women's co-operatives, particularly in non traditional sectors. It has encouraged the public service to set a good example in terms of positive action, and is assembling data on women in high-level positions in the major public sectors (including the Commission itself). The Commission believes that it is vital for women to rise to positions of influence and responsibility in economic, social and political life, where their presence may be felt when it comes to taking the necessary decisions for the future.

3.1.9. The advent, development and spread of new technologies is proving to be one of the greatest challenges to the future employment of women, and the contents of their jobs. Women more often lack the necessary training in the new technologies and are not encouraged to acquire it, due to the persisting preconceived notions about their role in society. They also generally hold jobs more likely to be changed or even to disappear completely, once new technologies are introduced in the work place. The challenge of new technologies could, however, also lead to the opening of new opportunities for women, and to the breakdown of the traditional divide between men's and women's jobs. It is the Commission's view that all concerned should be encouraged to concentrate their efforts in this, more positive, direction. It therefore commissioned a number of studies concerned with various aspects of the impact of new technologies on women's jobs, as well as organising or supporting seminars and other meetings on this subject. Through the European Social Fund, it is subsidising the training of women for occupations using the new technologies, which could lead them to interesting and rewarding employment. It also aids the creation of women's co-operatives in this sector.

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3.1.10. In order to acquire the necessary detailed knowledge on the position of women in the labour market, and to collect the relevant data, the Commission has created a Community-level expert group working in close co-operation with EUROSTAT. This group regularly updates the statistics, once assembled, and will be available for more detailed future analysis of certain areas posing particular problems to women in employment.

EUROSTAT itself already compiles a considerable number of statistical series, broken down by sex, particularly in the fields of demography and the labour market (employment and unemployment). In addition to this, the Commission has found it useful to conduct a number of surveys on specific aspects not yet covered by statistics (perceptions of discrimination at work, attitudes to new technologies or the risk of unemployment; the occupational situation of self-employed women).

3.1.11. The Commission is concerned about the dual disadvantage faced by female immigrants, in that they are both women and immigrants, and thus often dependent on rights derived indirectly through their husbands under the national legislation of the host countries. It has studied the legal and administrative discriminations facing immigrant women and commissioned a study on their specific training needs, with a view to taking further action on their behalf during the five years to be covered by the next Action Programme.

3.1.12. Since equality begins at home, the Commission is also striving to enable both men and women to find fulfilment in and combine satisfactorily their careers, their family and their social life. Apart from commissioning a report on the subject, it has pursued this objective by proposing the above mentioned directive on parental leave which would give each parent the right to take at least three months off work in order to look after an infant in the home. It has, furthermore, been studying the availability of child-care facilities for working parents in the Community and stimulated interest in, and discussion of, the subject by means of a Community-wide Seminar.

3.1.13 Finally, the Commission has been working to increase the awareness of the general public of the positive aspects of the change in attitudes now taking place. In this context, it has carried out a thorough analysis of the image of women on television, which will lead to recommendations for changes to be made.

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3.1.14. The Decade has seen a considerable increase in the participation of women in the labour market: the proportion of economically active women in the female population of 15 to 64 years in the European Community rose from 46.8% in 1975 to 50.2% in 1983, whereas over the same period the activity rate of men on this basis fell from 86.8% to 82.4%.

The more recent deterioration in the general economic situation has in its turn caused women to be affected particularly severely since they still tend to suffer from a number of disadvantages on the labour market and in terms of their qualifications. In June 1984, the Council therefore adopted a Resolution on action to combat unemployment among women (1); this recognises the equal right of men and women to work and, by the same token, to acquire a personal income on equal terms and conditions with men, regardless of the economic situation.

3.1.15. The Community has, moreover, adopted resolutions under a number of broader headings which, nevertheless, provide specifically for the introduction of measures designed to help women. These concern vocational training policies in the European Community in the 1980s (2), the promotion of employment for young people (3), vocational training measures relating to new information technologies (4), and measures relating to the introduction of new information technologies in the field of education (5). Another resolution is concerned with the contribution of local employment initiatives to combating unemployment (6).

3.1.16. The European Social Fund is the financial instrument used by the Community to put its employment policies into practice. Following the recent revision of the Fund's operations, resources are now concentrated on young people under the age of 25, and in favour of employment in the disadvantaged regions. The promotion of equal opportunities for women in particular through the diversification of job opportunities, is one of the priority areas for the Fund.

3.1.17. As regards the second major theme of the Women's Decade, development, the Community has also made considerable strides forward, during the past ten years, in integrating women into its development policy. The fact that these efforts bore tangible fruit only at a relatively late stage in the Decade, must be linked with the history of the Community's development policy as a whole which, with the signing of the first Lomé Convention in 1974, embarked on a completely new phase: the very year (1975) that the UN Decade for Women began.

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(1) O.J. C161, 21.6.1984, p. 4

(2) O.J. C193, 20.7.1983, p. 2

(3) O.J. C 29, 4.2.1984, p. 1

(4) O.J. C166, 25.6.1983, p. 1

(5) O.J. C256, 24.9.1983, p. 1

(6) O.J. C161, 21.6.1984, p. 1

3.1.18. In November 1982, the Community adopted conclusions (1) stressing the important role that women must play in the development process.

The text adopted has the following principal objectives:

- to recognise women as important factors in the development process and to allow them to play their full part in it;
- to allow women to find their rightful place in society, by improving their economic and social status, without, however, imposing unsuitable models on them from outside.

The implementation of these objectives must go hand in hand with a number of operational measures. Thus, systematic sociological studies should be carried out prior to the implementation of projects and programmes, so as to avoid negative effects for women, particularly in rural areas. Any possible negative consequences of technological and economic modernisation in particular, should be avoided.

Consideration should, secondly, be given within each project to the female population affected by it, particularly as regards the priority areas for women: education/training, employment/income creation, health, appropriate technologies.

Thirdly, contacts should be established with women's organisations in the developing countries, so that these may participate, through the involvement of local communities, in the development of their countries. The Community regards it as important to know about the fundamental needs and priority objectives of these associations.

3.1.19. In 1984, the Commission held two seminars on the participation of rural women in development. The first of these, which took place in Lomé, was attended by representatives from Benin, Upper Volta, Mali, Niger, the Ivory Coast and Togo, all of whom had direct experience in rural development. The second, held in Nairobi, brought together representatives from Ethiopia, Malawi, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Both seminars defined priorities on the participation of rural women of these areas in the development process. They were regarded as extremely valuable by the Commission which intends to make good use of their results by taking more account of the practical impact of development projects on women in the countries concerned, in particular in rural areas, and by enabling them to participate more effectively in drawing up such projects, carrying them out and following up their outcome.

3.1.20. The Third Lomé Convention, signed on 8 December 1984, constitutes a major step forward for the integration of women into the development co-operation policy of the European Community. This Convention, for the first time, includes a Title headed "Cultural and Social Co-operation" with an Article devoted exclusively to women.

This Article 123 states :

- firstly, that co-operation shall support the ACP States' efforts aimed at enhancing the work of women, improving their living conditions, expanding their role and promoting their status in the production and development process;
- secondly, that particular attention shall be given to access by women to all aspects of training, to more advanced technology, to credit and to co-operative organisations, and to appropriate technology aimed at alleviating the arduous nature of their tasks.

Article 123 forms a secure basis for the practical efforts which the Community intends to undertake for women in the future pursuit of its development policies.

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- 3.1.21. Turning to the sub-themes of the Decade, the first and, in the eyes of the European Community, most important one, employment, has already been amply covered above under the heading of equality.
- 3.1.22. As regards health, the Community gives high priority to protecting the health and safety of workers, while striving also to safeguard the principle of equal treatment for men and women in employment. This leads it to undertake considerable research and other efforts to improve the protection of all workers, whether they be men or women, while simultaneously seeking the abolition of laws excluding women alone from certain types of employment, promotion, etc., "when the concern for protection which originally inspired them, is no longer well-founded" (Directive 76/207/EEC).
- 3.1.23. Health protection for women also includes adequate provision being made for pregnancy and maternity. The Commission has carried out a comparative study on the relevant legislation of the Member States with a view to identifying the most appropriate protective provisions for motherhood.
- It has further proposed, in its draft Directive on the application of the principle of equal treatment as between men and women engaged in an activity, including agriculture, in a self-employed capacity, and on the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood (1), that women working in such occupations should be entitled either to financial compensation for forgone income, or to the help of a relief worker during a period of maternity leave, so as to afford to them the same maternity protection which is already available to workers in other sectors.
- 3.1.24. The Commission believes that education in general and guidance (towards certain subjects and careers) in particular has significant implications for girls and boys and their later adult lives and careers. Education may inculcate gender-based stereotypes into young persons, but it can also lead them towards attitudes free of such bias at a time when their adult working lives are still in front of them.

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(1) O.J. C 113, 27.4.1984, p. 4

3.1.25. In order to foster this more positive approach, an experimental information network on equal opportunities in career choices has been set up at Community level in order to prepare young women for working life. This network, provided for under the New Community Action Programme on the Promotion of Equal Opportunities for Women (1982-1985), has the dual task of, firstly, stimulating national integrated education and training programmes with the objective of diversifying women's employment and their occupational choices and, secondly, disseminating information on actions developed to this end in the Member States.

3.1.26. In November 1984, a high-level conference at Community level brought together, for the first time, representatives of the education authorities and the equal opportunities bodies of the Member States. The Conference agreed that new positive actions for equality in education should be launched throughout the Community. The Commission is therefore preparing an extensive programme for adoption by the Council in June 1985, which contains the following elements :

- active co-education as well as more even distribution of men and women at all levels of the teaching profession;
- teacher training to include equal opportunities matters;
- increasing the awareness of pupils, parents and teachers;
- measures to encourage greater diversification of occupational choices ;
- elimination of sex stereotypes from all teaching materials;
- specific action to help girls experiencing particular difficulties, such as the daughters of migrant workers and girls requiring particular attention to increase their motivation to learn, and
- evaluation of experiences gained.

3.1.27. In order to facilitate the transition of young people from education to adult and working life, the Commission launched, in 1983, a second programme of pilot projects seeking to enable 14 to 19 year olds to face the challenges and uncertainties of the present day. Throughout the programme, equal opportunities for girls and boys are being promoted, particularly so as to allow both to avail themselves of the full spread of possible career choices.

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3.2 Forward-looking strategies aimed at the year 2000

3.2.1 The European Community has welcomed the International Women's Decade, since this has not only stimulated its own activities for women, but also integrated these into a broader international framework, itself stimulated by the United Nations, within which information and experiences may be exchanged and joint actions carried out. The Decade has been a successful venture, serving to considerably improve the situation of women throughout the world, although continuing efforts will be required for the full attainment of the goals set down in the World Plan of Action.

Turning to the future, the achievements of the past ten years must not only be safeguarded and reinforced, but further developed and broadened.

One option for pursuing this aim, is the launching of a further women's decade. The Commission is not inclined to support this proposal, which would imply considerable machinery (meetings, world conferences, publicity, etc.) and expense for future years.

The Commission, together with many UN member states, favours a more flexible approach, i.e. to set a target date such as the year 2000 as the date by which governments will strive to have made further significant progress in implementing the goals laid down for the Decade and at its final World Conference. Such an approach would preserve the momentum, now established, towards further positive change throughout the countries of the world. The guiding themes could remain those currently valid, with the Community stressing its particular attachment to the three sub-themes of employment, health and education, as well as the principal themes of equality and development.

3.2.2 As for its own contribution to the forward-looking strategies to be pursued during the coming years, the first of these will develop logically from the Community's input into the World Conference (the report on the implementation of the Action Programme) as well as the outcome of the said Conference. The Commission intends to draft a programme of action for the advancement of women during the five years in the immediate future, i.e. 1986 to 1990. This programme will contain those aspects of Community policy in need of reinforcement, further development or expansion. After five years, a review should follow, leading in turn to further policy decisions or adaptations as required.

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- 3.2.3. It is the Commission's belief that the United Nations should strive, during the period up to the year 2000, and more particularly during the second half of the 1980s, not only to continue and reinforce efforts already underway as regards the promotion of equality by means of legislation and concrete actions, but also to develop appropriate new politics in these areas.
- 3.2.4. Legislation adopted during the Decade must be strengthened and reliably applied. This involves in particular appropriate means of monitoring (with the help of committees, work inspectors, government officials, etc) information and awareness campaigns directed at the parties concerned, and improved channels of appeal. Consideration should be given to the possible merits of a reversal of the burden of proof for workers wishing to assert their right to equal treatment under existing legislation.
- 3.2.5. Additional legislative measures should be envisaged to deal with key problems not yet resolved. The Community could make a contribution here by adopting the proposals on parental leave and leave for family reasons, equal treatment for the self-employed, including farmers, and occupational social security schemes, currently under discussion. It will also be considering the future of protective legislation and equality in connection with income taxation.
- 3.2.6. Further improvements must be brought about in the availability of data - qualitative and quantitative, at national and international levels - on women's working lives. This will provide an increasingly reliable foundation for further positive actions in various sectors of the economy.
- 3.2.7. The desegregation of men and women in the workplace will need further encouragement; actions to achieve a more balanced representation of both women and men in all sectors and at all levels of the enterprise, should be broadened to encompass an ever increasing share of the economy. The creation of women's co-operatives and other local employment initiatives taken by women, merits continued support by the authorities concerned.

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- 3.2.8. Women whose employment has been shown during past years to be particularly vulnerable (women working in large factories or in personal or domestic services, women heads of single parent families, immigrant women) will require intensified efforts in terms of training and/or positive actions, in order to enable them to attain greater security and fulfilment in their jobs.
- 3.2.9. The problems associated with outworking, both in the traditional and new technology areas, should be studied and any necessary actions on behalf of these workers proposed.
- 3.2.10. The continuing challenge of new technologies will imply a broad range of activities : information, the raising of consciousness, education, initial and further training, as well as measures to encourage women to diversify their occupational choices.
- 3.2.11. In order to help women and men to improve the sharing of occupational, family and social responsibilities between them, more childcare facilities should be provided for parents. Other public infrastructures (working hours of public services, transport schedules, shopping hours, etc.) should be analysed for their impact on women's working opportunities. The continuing debate on the reduction and reorganisation of working time should also pay particular attention to those aspects of concern to women, such as flexitime, time credits, and the possibility of granting extra leave in return for particularly arduous work (night work, etc.).
- 3.2.12. Action will be required to remedy the serious problem of women's unemployment and to assure a better place on the labour markets of the future for girls still in full-time education. The Community will be putting into effect the Council resolution on women's unemployment; this will lead to the establishment of an annual exchange of information on measures taken in the Member States. Such measures could include, in particular, improved guidance of job seekers towards sectors with enhanced employment opportunities.

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3.2.13. In the development sphere, much will have to be done to fully integrate women into the various aspects of the development effort. The Community, for its part, will make good use of the new Article 123 of the Lomé III Convention which should allow it to provide to a much greater extent than hitherto for the important role played by women in the ACP countries.

3.2.14. Turning to the sub-themes of the Women's Decade, the Commission's views on action to be promoted in the field of employment, has already been covered above under the heading of equality.

3.2.15. As for health, it believes that further action should be taken to bring about the adjustment of such protective legislation that is aimed only at women (see 3.1.22 above) and is no longer justified.

Studies on the effects of lead, radiation and other toxic agents on the reproductive systems of workers, whether male or female, should be pursued. Research will, moreover, be required into new occupational diseases or health hazards resulting from the growing use of new technologies and work processes and the inevitability of further change in these areas.

Maternity protection legislation, together with that on parental leave and leave for family reasons, should be adjusted in such a way that the social function of child-bearing and child-rearing is recognised.

Studies and seminars on health education, including sex education, should be pursued.

3.2.16. Work on equality in education must be continued and intensified with the objective of eliminating stereotypes in order to give boys and girls real equality of opportunity and to widen the choice of occupation for girls. The Community, for its part, has already launched a number of actions to pursue during the coming years, as outlined in 3.1.24 - 3.1.27 above.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1. The position outlined in Chapter 3 of this Communication will form the basis for any further written or oral contributions to the World Conference by the Community on matters falling within the Community's competence or interests. It will thus form the foundation for a number of statements on different agenda items to be delivered in Nairobi by the Community spokesperson.

The Commissioner's speech on behalf of the Community, to be prepared on this basis by the Commission Services, will be presented to the competent Council Group.

The main themes outlined in this Communication will also serve as the basis for draft resolutions to be submitted for adoption to the World Conference by the Community and its Member States. The Community will furthermore have to ensure that it is in a position to make a clear statement on the outcome of the Conference, as was done in Copenhagen (1980). The wording of the resolutions and the final statement will be prepared in the Council before the Conference and adopted in the procedure of on-the-spot Community co-ordination.

- 4.2. It will be important for the Community to focus the Conference's attention on the theme of equality, coupled with the sub-themes of employment, health and education. The Community and its Member States should strive to concentrate the debate on issues of substance relating to the advancement of women, with a view to obtaining positive results.

Discussion of problems specific to developing countries is of great importance and should be pursued diligently and thoroughly; the Community can make a valuable contribution here. Equality in employment should nevertheless be a priority matter for the Community which has already made considerable commitments in this respect.

At a time of economic difficulties when vulnerable groups - and women in particular - are confronted with great difficulties, measures to promote equal opportunities in employment are of the utmost importance. The Community should make this priority clear both in its statements and proposals for resolutions and forward-looking strategies.

A positive, concrete and pragmatic approach to this issue is the best way for the Community to make a substantial contribution to the Conference, to promote valuable discussion at international level and to obtain conclusions and guidelines which could serve as a useful basis and incentive for future work at both Community, national and international levels.