ARTICLE 8

TEXT OF ARTICLE 8

The United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

1. This section deals with Article 8 of the Charter, which is an application of the principle that there should be no discrimination based on sex. During the period under review, there was no change in the application or interpretation of that Article.

2. The present study contains a general survey and an analysis of those decisions of the principal organs of the United Nations having a direct bearing on Article 8.

I. GENERAL SURVEY

3. During the period under review, the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality was discussed with great interest by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in their own sessions or in those of their subsidiary organs. The General Assembly adopted the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade and, in order to extend and accelerate action for the advancement of women, the Assembly proclaimed 1975 as International Women’s Year as a way to enhance equality between men and women.

4. The Staff Regulations of the United Nations and the Staff Rules implementing these Regulations were revised to bring them fully in line with the decisions of the General Assembly regarding the elimination of differential treatment based on sex.

II. ANALYTICAL SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

A. Participation of men and women in the United Nations Secretariat

5. The Staff Regulations and the Staff Rules of the United Nations Secretariat, which govern the selection of staff, contain provisions concerning the participation of men and women in the United Nations Secretariat.

**1. PROVISIONS CONCERNING PARTICIPATION IN ANY CAPACITY

2. PROVISIONS CONCERNING PARTICIPATION UNDER CONDITIONS OF EQUALITY

6. The difference in treatment between male and female staff members under the Staff Rules was the subject of a Judgement of the Administrative Tribunal delivered on 10 October 1972. Specifically, the issue brought before the Tribunal related to the denial of a claim of a female staff member for reimbursement of the expenses of her husband who travelled with her on home leave. The applicant contended that, in prescribing different conditions for payment of travel expenses in respect of spouses of male and female staff members, staff rule 107.5(a) was inconsistent with Article 8 of the Charter.

7. The Tribunal rejected the application, holding that the part of rule 107.5(a) that entitled a female staff member to payment of her husband’s travel expenses only if he was a “dependent husband” was consistent with Staff Regulation 7.1 and that the applicant could derive no right to reimbursement from the other part of the same rule which enabled payment of travel expenses for a male staff member’s wife regardless of her dependency status. However, the Tribunal stated: “By making a distinction between wife and husband for the payment of travel expenses in connexion with home leave, the Staff Rules establish a distinction by reason of sex between staff members, and this distinction would appear contrary to the principle of equal conditions of employment enunciated in Article 8 of the Charter. While it is the responsibility of the Secretary-General to implement that principle with regard to payment of a spouse’s travel under staff regulation 7.1 and while he possesses a wide discretion in this respect, his discretion must be exercised in accordance with Article 8 of the Charter.”

8. The matter of differential treatment based on sex under the Staff Regulations and Rules was touched upon by the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh session in the context of its review of the composition of the Secretariat, with particular reference to the question of employment of women in the secretariats of all organizations in the United Nations common system. By resolution 3007 (XXVII) of 18 December 1972, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit at its twenty-eighth session a study on those provisions of the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules of the United Nations whose application might in certain cases give rise to discrimination between staff members on grounds of sex.

9. In response to that request the Secretary-General submitted a report in which he concluded that the existing Staff Regulations and Rules contained a number of distinctions based on sex in regard to the conditions of service. With the sole exception of maternity leave, all these distinctions arose out of the traditional concept of the husband as normally the “breadwinner” in the family; as this concept implied that the wife was normally the dependent partner, the Staff Regulations and Rules provided for differential treatment of men and women in regard to travel entitlements and separation...
payments. But the Secretary-General considered that, in the light of contemporary thinking as to the values to be attached to equality of rights of men and women under the law, there appeared to be compelling reasons for eliminating distinctions based on sex from the statutory provisions governing the employment of the staff of the United Nations. However, since any change in these definitions would affect the United Nations common system as a whole, the matter would need to be reviewed in co-operation with the other organizations so that an agreed proposal might be put before the General Assembly at its twenty-ninth session.

10. On the recommendation of the Fifth Committee,6 the General Assembly, at its 2206th meeting of 18 December 1973, decided without a vote to take note of the Secretary-General's report on the understanding that specific proposals for action would be submitted at the next session.

11. In April 1974 the Administrative Committee on Coordination approved a number of proposals that had been agreed upon by its Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions, on the modifications to be made in the Staff Regulations and Rules. These were set out in the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly at its twenty-ninth session.7 This explained the principles underlying the proposals by noting that the traditional concept of the husband as normally the "bread-winner" in the family ("derived from the common law doctrine of 'coverture' ") had recently undergone change, as reflected in the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,8 which called for all appropriate measures to be taken to ensure the universal recognition in law and in fact of the principle of equality of men and women proclaimed in the Charter. The changes to be made in the Staff Regulations and Rules embodied two principles of the Declaration: equality of remuneration and safeguarding the unity of the family.9 Though the specific proposals related only to travel expenses and separation payments, the Secretary-General's report also announced the intention to amend the rules governing compensation in the event of death, injury or illness attributable to official duties, once an interagency working group had resolved certain problems relating to their interaction with the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board.

12. The amendments proposed by the Secretary-General were considered by the General Assembly at its twenty-ninth session, which adopted amendments to Staff Regulations 7.1 and 9.4, and to annex IV to the Regulations.9 These amendments10 consisted of changes in the rules to ensure equal treatment of staff members of both sexes in regard to travel expenses and repatriation grant. In general, these amendments made conditions of eligibility for payment of such expenses and benefits in respect of a wife or husband uniformly applicable to married staff members, irrespective of the dependency status of the spouse. Accordingly, all the references in the relevant rules to "dependants", which had been understood in the past to comprise "a wife, dependent husband and dependent children", were replaced by other appropriate terms denoting "a spouse and dependent children". Among the rules so amended, particular attention was drawn to rule 107.5, "Definition of eligible family members for the purposes of official travel", rule 109.5, "Repatriation grant", and rule 109.10(a)(vi), "Last day for pay purposes in the event of death".

13. The United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board reported to the twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly11 that the regulations of the Fund differentiated in certain respects between the benefit entitlements of male and female participants. In particular, the survivor's benefits were automatic in the event of death. In general, these amendments consisted of changes in the rules to ensure equal treatment based on sex in the Staff Regulations and Rules. To this end amendments were made to the provisions of the rules in order to give effect to the Secretary-General's intention, as reported to the General Assembly, "to amend the rules, wherever appropriate, by discontinuing the practice of referring to staff members in the masculine gender only". Accordingly, the English text of the rules was completely revised to replace all references in the masculine gender by pronouns of both the masculine and feminine gender or by common terms suitable in the context. However, the French text was not amended in this way, as it would have been linguistically inappropriate to do so. To ensure concordance between the two authentic texts, rule 112.1 was amended to provide that: "In the French text of these rules, reference to staff members in the masculine gender shall apply to staff members of both sexes, unless clearly inappropriate from the context."

3. DISCUSSION CONCERNING APPOINTMENT AND PROMOTION OF WOMEN AND CONDITIONS OF EQUALITY

15. Consequent on a recommendation of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Economic and Social Council transmitted12 to the General Assembly a draft resolution on the employment of qualified women in senior and other professional positions by the secretariats of organizations in the United Nations system.

16. At its twenty-fifth session, the Assembly considered the proposed resolution and the matter was discussed by the Third Committee within the context of its consideration of the status of women and by the Fifth Committee to the extent that the subject of the draft resolution related to the recruitment policy of the Secretariat. The Third Committee endorsed the draft resolution recommended by the Council, and it was subsequently adopted by the General Assembly as resolution 2715 (XXV). By this resolution, the General Assembly expressed the hope that "the United Nations, including its special bodies and all intergovernmental agencies in the United Nations system of organizations, will set an example with regard to the opportunities they afford for the employment of women at senior and other professional levels".

17. The Fifth Committee based its discussions on the Secretary-General's observations contained in his report on the composition of the Secretariat,13 and included in its report on this subject14 a statement in which it noted the under-representation of women in the Secretariat, particularly at the senior level, and requested the Secretary-General to encourage Governments of Member States to make available qualified women to compete for positions of responsibility in the Secretariat, particularly at the senior level; to continue to ensure that the selection, appointment and promotion of Secretariat staff at all levels was conducted without distinction as to sex; and to adhere to the request contained in the Economic and Social Council resolution and include in his report to the General Assembly at its twenty-sixth session data on women employed in the United Nations Secretariat.
18. At its twenty-seventh session, the General Assembly again urged that appropriate measures be taken, "including more extensive publicizing of the right of individuals personally to apply for vacant positions, in order to ensure equal opportunities for the employment of qualified women at the senior and professional levels and in policy making positions." 19

19. In the recommendations which the Secretary-General submitted to the twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly regarding the principles, standards and procedures to be used as guidelines for the recruitment of the staff of the United Nations, 20 he included the following: "(b) Pursuant to Article 8 of the Charter, no restriction shall be placed on the eligibility of men and women to be recruited for any post in the Secretariat under conditions of equality."

20. After the Fifth Committee had considered these proposals, the General Assembly approved 21 a decision of the Committee 22 according to which the recruitment policies of the United Nations should be governed by the consideration that: "(c) Bearing in mind the need for equitable geographical distribution, increased efforts should be made to recruit a greater number of qualified women candidates for professional and senior level posts."

21. Similarly, the necessity to strike a balance between on the one hand the employment of women in the Secretariat in any capacity and under conditions of equality and on the other the principle of equitable geographical distribution is also to be found in resolution 8 23 adopted by the World Conference of the International Women's Year which took place in Mexico City from 19 June to 2 July 1975, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 30/10 (XXVII). 24

22. At the thirtieth session, the Secretary-General, in his report on the composition of the Secretariat, 25 underlined that there was a marked disparity in the availability of women candidates between countries and regions and that no real breakthrough in the employment of women in Professional posts in the Secretariat would be possible so long as the recruitment of women was subject to the guidelines of geographical distribution. He further indicated that the Joint Advisory Committee had decided to set up a Standing Committee on Employment of Women in the Secretariat, the purpose of which would be to ensure that the principle of equal rights of men and women staff members was observed not only in law but also in fact. 26

23. During the debate which took place in the Assembly's Fifth Committee, some members expressed the view that the objective of increased representation of women could be reconciled with the principle of geographical distribution by taking a regional approach to the recruitment of women. 27 Conversely some representatives opposed any compartmentalization of the Secretariat by establishing a quota for women; 28 viewed the new idea of regional quotas as a dangerous innovation; 29 and underlined that the injustice of sexual discrimination should not be remedied at the expense of the principle of equitable geographical distribution. 30

24. On 8 December 1975 the General Assembly adopted the text recommended by the Fifth Committee 31 as resolution 3416 (XXX), which includes the following provisions:

"The General Assembly,

"Bearing in mind Articles 8 and 101 of the Charter of the United Nations and those declarations and instruments adopted by the United Nations acknowledging the equality of status of men and women, inter alia the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

" . . .

"1. Reaffirms that equitable distribution of the positions between men and women in the Secretariat is a major principle governing the recruitment policy of the United Nations;

"2. Urges Member States to intensify their efforts to seek and recommend qualified women candidates for professional posts in the Secretariat;

"3. Requests the Secretary-General to make every effort during each of the next two biennia, 1976-1977 and 1978-1979, to fill a number of posts subject to geographical distribution equivalent to 5 per cent of the mid-point of the desirable range of each region for the appointment of qualified women, with priority being given to candidates from countries which are not represented or are under-represented in the Secretariat, while not adversely affecting opportunities for the recruitment of qualified men from the same unrepresented and under-represented countries."

25. In his report 32 to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session, the Secretary-General indicated that the number of posts equivalent to 5 per cent of the range of each region on the basis of the desirable ranges on 30 June 1976 would be 130 and that the number of women to be appointed in the biennium by region would be: Africa-10, Asia and the Far East-26, Eastern Europe-31, Latin America-9, Middle East-4 and North America and the Caribbean-28. He further reported 33 that, following a recommendation made by the Joint Advisory Committee and its Standing Committee on the Employment of Women, he was giving serious consideration to the appointment of an ombudsman or panel of the same nature to deal with the complaints and grievances of staff who felt discriminated against by virtue of their sex or any other reason not related to their service. He also recommended the establishment of training courses to make staff more aware of ways in which persons are discriminated against and how to avoid them.

26. By resolution 31/26, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to appoint as soon as possible a panel to investigate allegations of discriminatory treatment and to recommend appropriate action.

27. On 28 July 1977 an administrative instruction 34 established a panel to investigate allegations by staff members of discriminatory treatment in the United Nations Secretariat "on grounds such as those referred to in article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights". Each case was to be treated in a confidential manner and the main task of the panel was to seek a reconciliation between the parties. If a matter could not be so settled, the Panel was to recommend appropriate action to the Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services. The same year, the Secretary-General issued a bulletin 35 on the subject of equality of men and women staff members within the Secretariat. Its purpose was to establish administrative measures designed to give effect to that policy.

28. At the thirty-second session of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General stated in his report on the composition of the Secretariat 36 that the Secretariat was facing real difficulties in increasing the number of women on the staff, particularly at the senior levels. Not only were most candidates recommended by Member States men, but most women candidates known to the United Nations were qualified chiefly in social sciences and information, fields for which there were fewer vacancies than in the administrative, economic and legal fields. He requested the assistance of Member States in identifying women candidates for all occupations in the Secretariat.

29. During the debate in the Fifth Committee, one representative pointed out 37 that the responsibility for putting forward women candidates did not lie with States alone; indeed the ultimate responsibility for improvements lay with the Secretary-General. With respect to the slow rate of progress, the same representative expressed doubts 38 on the possibility of complying with the General Assembly resolutions setting
the outcome had invariably been to call for an increase in the proportion of women staff members without prejudice to geographical distribution. Such statements of policy meant that it was the wish of Member States to see in the service of the international organizations both men and women who had come from all parts of the world. Finally, the organizations saw little merit in the creation of trainee posts for which women would be given preference. Nor could they accept the related proposal that permanent posts should be selected for those women who had proved to be satisfactory after a year's probationary service. The proposal to establish trainee posts would run into the same kind of difficulty as had been encountered in some organizations in the past when such a scheme had been considered for both men and women. Moreover, to open them preferentially for women would not, in the view of the organizations, be consistent with the fundamental principle of equality of opportunity. For similar reasons they were unable to accept the proposal that women should be subject to a shorter period of probation than men.

34. At the same session, the Joint Inspection Unit submitted to the General Assembly its second report on the implementation of the personnel policy reforms approved by the General Assembly in 1974. Although this report did not focus particularly on equality between men and women in the Secretariat, some of its suggestions were viewed by one representative at the Fifth Committee as recommendations which, if implemented, would facilitate the recruitment of women to Professional posts.

35. On 20 December 1978, the General Assembly adopted resolution 33/143 by a recorded vote of 132 to none, with no abstentions. This resolution included the following provisions:

"The General Assembly,

- Taking note with appreciation of the reports of the Joint Inspection Unit on the implementation of the personnel policy reforms approved by the General Assembly in 1974, on women in the Professional category and above in the United Nations system...
- Calling upon the Secretary-General and all the United Nations organizations to put an end to any form of discrimination based on sex, as laid down in Article 8 of the Charter of the United Nations, in conditions of employment, recruitment, promotion and training and to ensure that the opportunities for employment and promotion of women in the United Nations system are equal to those of men,..."

"III"

1. Requests the Secretary-General to take the necessary measures to increase the number of women in posts subject to geographical distribution to 25 per cent of the total over a four-year period in accordance with the principle of equitable geographical distribution and requests other United Nations organizations similarly to establish targets for this purpose;

2. Requests the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the executive heads of the other organizations within the United Nations system to issue, in accordance with the principle of equitable geographical distribution, policy statements and directives necessary to foster equal employment and career development opportunities for women;

3. Requests the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the executive heads of the other organizations within the United Nations system, in pursuit of these objectives:
"(a) To ensure that women are henceforth fairly represented on personnel advisory and administrative boards;

"(b) To review existing recruitment literature, publicity and promotion procedures, internal training programmes and staff rules in order to ensure that women and men enjoy equal opportunity for promotion and career development;

"(c) To review and revise, as necessary, staff rules and procedures covering assignments of married couples to the same duty station, maternity leave, part-time employment and flexible working hours;

"4. Invites the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination to review the situation regarding recruitment of, and career development opportunities for, women in the secretariats of the organizations within the United Nations system and to submit periodic reports to the General Assembly incorporating specific proposals to achieve this objective, from the thirty-fourth session of the Assembly onwards;

"5. Calls upon Member States to assist the United Nations and the specialized agencies to increase the proportion of women in the Professional category and above by nominating more women candidates and co-operating with the Secretary-General in the recruitment measures outlined in the present resolution;

"6. Requests the Joint Inspection Unit to continue to study and report on the implementation of the provisions of the present resolution dealing with personnel policies and the improvement of the representation of women in the Professional category and above in the United Nations system, from the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly onwards;”.

B. Participation in other United Nations organs

36. At its twenty-third session, in 1970, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted a resolution entituled “Programme of concerted international action for the advancement of women” for adoption by the General Assembly. The draft contained an annex setting forth a number of general objectives and minimum targets to be achieved during the Second Development Decade in administration and public life among other things. The Commission suggested a substantial increase in the number of women participating in public and government life at the local, national and international levels, and in the number of women in responsible posts at the executive and policy-making levels, including those related to overall development planning.

37. At its fifty-second session, in 1972, the Economic and Social Council adopted a resolution on the recommendation of the Commission on the Status of Women entitled “Activities of agencies in the United Nations system of special concern to women.” The operative part of this resolution included the following provisions:

"The Economic and Social Council,

"1. Expresses the hope that the Governments of Member States will recognize the importance of an increased presence of women on their national delegations, both at the general conferences of and at the various meetings and conferences organized within these agencies, as well as within national committees and other national liaison bodies;

"2. Expresses also the hope that the Secretary-General will invite the executive heads of the International Labour Organisation, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Health Organization, and also the United Nations Children’s Fund and the United Nations Development Programme, to continue to recommend to member States increased participation of women in activities within the competence of their agencies and to ensure that women are present in all sectors of their secretariats.”

38. At its twenty-fifth session, the Commission on the Status of Women approved a draft resolution on the study of the interrelationship of the status of women and family planning. Paragraph 5 of this draft resolution urged all Member States to provide equal representation for women on their delegations to the World Population Conference, thus giving them a share in the formulation and adoption of a comprehensive and effective World Population Plan of Action. During the consideration of this draft resolution, India expressed reservation with respect to operative paragraph 5: it did not consider it opportune to request Governments to provide equal representation, since some might want more women and some fewer to participate in the Conference.

39. At its fifty-sixth session, in 1974, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 1849 (LVI) on International Women’s Year, the annex of which mentioned, among the objective and the goals of the Year, the need for programmes directed towards ensuring that women as well as men participated fully and as equal partners in policy formulation and decision-making at the local, national and international levels, including questions of foreign policy such as disarmament and the strengthening of friendly relations among States. Regarding the activities to be undertaken at the national level, the same annex stated that Governments should place a greater number of qualified women on national delegations to international conferences, United Nations sessions and meetings, and other international meetings dealing with problems of major national concern and that the Secretary-General should remind Governments of the need for steadily increasing such participation by women.

40. At its twenty-seventh session, in 1978, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted a resolution which required action by the Economic and Social Council on women in development of international conferences. In operative paragraph 5(a), the Commission called upon the Council to urge all Governments to ensure: “That women are involved in the planning stages of international conferences and are included in the governmental delegations attending the above-mentioned conferences”. During the discussion of this draft, the delegation of the United Kingdom expressed its Government’s reservations on the paragraph on the basis that merit and not sex should be the criteria for governmental delegations attending conferences. At its 15th plenary meeting, on 5 May 1978, the Economic and Social Council took note of the report of the Commission on the Status of Women on its twenty-seventh session.

Notes

1 G A resolution 2626 (XXV).
2 G A resolution 3010 (XXVII).
3 See paras. 12 and 14 below.
5 A/C.5/1519 (mimeographed).
6 G A (28), Annexes, a.i. 86, A/9462, para. 10.
7 A/C.5/1063 (mimeographed).
8 G A resolution 2263 (XXII).
9 Articles 10 and 6, respectively.
10 G A resolution 3353 (XXIX).
11 ST/SG/Staff Rules/1/Rev.3.
12 G A (29), Suppl. No. 9, A/9609, paras. 51-53.
13 G A resolution 3354 (XXIX), part II.
14 ST/SGB/Staff Rules/1/Rev.3.
15 ECS resolution 1510 (XLVIII).
16 G A (25), Annexes, a.i. 82, A/8156.
17 Ibid., A/8098.
18 See also the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization, submitted to the twenty-sixth session of the General Assembly (G A (26) Suppl. No. 1 (A/8401), part five, chap. III, A. "Employment of women").
19 G A resolution 3009 (XXVII), para. 3.
20 A/9724, para. 29 (mimeographed).
21 G A (29), Suppl. No. 31 (A/9631), p. 129 (decision a.i. 81).
22 Ibid., Annexes, a.i. 81, A/9980, para. 45.
23 E/CONF. 66/34, p. 60 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.76.IV.1).
24 See also the World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the objectives of the International Women's Year adopted by the Conference (Ibid., p. 35, para. 187).
25 A/10184, p. 12, para. 35 (mimeographed).
26 Ibid., para. 36.
27 GA (30) 5th Com., 1742nd mtg., para. 19; 1750th mtg., paras. 55 and 59.
28 Ibid., 1745th mtg., para. 68.
29 Ibid., 1751st mtg., para. 38.
30 Ibid., 1755th mtg., para. 5.
31 A/C.5/L.1257/Rev.2. The draft resolution as a whole, as revised, was adopted by the Fifth Committee by 83 votes to none, with 2 abstentions (G A (30) 5th Com., 1755th mtg., para. 22).
33 Ibid., p. 15, para. 24.
34 ST/AU/246, 28 July 1977.
35 ST/SGB/154, 8 March 1977.
36 A/32/146, p. 13, paras. 18-20 (mimeographed).
37 G A (32), 5th Com., 4th mtg., para. 21.
38 Ibid., para. 22.
39 A/33/176, pp. 23-24, paras. 18-19 (mimeographed).
40 A/33/105 (mimeographed).
41 JIU/REP/77/7 (mimeographed).
42 A/33/105, pp. 43-45 (mimeographed).
43 A/33/105/Add.1 (mimeographed).
44 Ibid., p. 4, para. 10.
45 Ibid., pp. 4-5, para. 12.
46 Ibid., pp. 5-6, para. 15.
47 A/33/228 (mimeographed). See also report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of personnel policy reform (A/C.5/33/2, mimeographed).
48 G A (33), 5th Com., 12th mtg., paras. 43-45.
49 ESC (48), Suppl. No. 6 (E/CN.6/546), chap. XIII, II pp. 63 and 64.
50 Ibid., pp. 64-67.
51 ESC resolution 1685 (LI).
52 ESC (52), Suppl. No. 6 (E/CN.6/568), chap. VIII, resolution 12, p. 75. For the text of the draft resolution see ibid., chap. IX, draft resolution X, p. 93.
54 Ibid., pp. 55-56, para. 141.
56 Ibid., p. 36, para. 99.