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Background Summary: UN Decade for Women

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BACKGROUND SUMMARY: UN Commission on the Status of Women

For three decades the UN Commission on the Status of Women, with the support of its UN Staff, has been the global advocate for women's advancement. Originally concerned with the legal status of women, the Commission later turned its attention to economic and social problems and has been responsible for UN action on behalf of women.

The 1967 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the 1975 World Plan of Action adopted at Mexico City by the World Conference of International Women's Year cover most of the issues the U.S. National Women's Conference debated in Houston. The Commission has incorporated these principles in a draft treaty, the draft Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, slated for UN adoption in the fall of 1978.

In addition to its responsibility for International Women's Year and the World Conference, the Decade for Women and a Mid-Decade World Conference scheduled for Iran in 1980, the Commission has directed a "Long-range programme for the advancement of women" which includes regional seminars on a variety of topics, from political rights to economic and social development. Many consider a meeting every two years to be inadequate for managing such a large program.

Its work may also be affected by two pending developments. The Commission's staff, now lodged at UN Headquarters, is slated to move, with the Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, by 1979 to UN offices in Vienna where space exists. In addition to the disruption of such a move just before the 1980 Conference, the staff will be far from the seat of decision-making. In addition, the Commission could "cease to exist", the recommendation of a group of experts charged with proposing a restructuring of the UN for more effective work in economic and social development. They believe UN work for women and that of other Commissions should be undertaken directly by the Economic and Social Council.