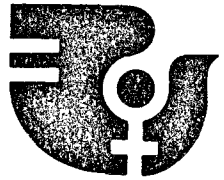




UNITED NATIONS



WORLD CONFERENCE
OF THE
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR
MEXICO CITY, 19 JUNE TO 2 JULY 1975

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CONF.66/NGO/9
25 June 1975

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Agenda item 10

THE INTEGRATION OF WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AS
EQUAL PARTNERS WITH MEN

Statement submitted by the International Organization
of Consumer Unions (category II)

The eighth Congress of the International Organization of Consumers Unions (IOCU) held in Sidney, Australia in March 1975 applauded the action of the United Nations General Assembly in proclaiming International Women's Year and pledged its full support to the goal of equality of men and women in social, economic and political spheres of activity.

The IOCU through more than 100 affiliates in some 60 nations was not content to give formalized applause to the equality concept. Our Congress sought out distinctive ways in which women might supply energetic and effective leadership to the new consumerism which is today sweeping through the nations of the world, old and new, demanding an end to fraud and deceptive practices, seeking to educate consumers to fill an effective role in combating inflation, and insisting on high product standards in the market place. This new consumerism is developing a new and effective thrust in the economic and social development of new countries as well as old.

While it is true that the consumer movement began in the industrialized world, it is not limited, as many believe, to the middle class industrialized countries. As our members in developing countries of Asia and the Pacific, Africa and the Caribbean and Latin America will testify, the need for organized activity on behalf of consumers is even greater in the newly developing countries and in rural areas, wherever cash is used to exchange labour for goods, whether these are simple tools for agriculture, seed, sewing machines, housing materials, pots, food or medicine. In the developing countries as well as in the developed, markets are flooded with competing products and even the most sophisticated buyer is helpless in making appropriate selections and comparative evaluations without adequate information and protection. Conversely, multinationals or domestic agents with exclusive rights often control markets leaving no choice to the buyer. The need for consumer protection on an organized scale extends to all levels of development.

Aware that International Women's Year affords an extraordinary opportunity for women to assume leadership in national consumer organizations and in the legislative efforts to create a new balance between producers and consumers, our IOCU Congress resolved to ask the Secretary-General of the United Nations to promptly prepare and issue a report on consumer protection in Member States of the United Nations. This report would assess the adequacy of existing laws and of their enforcement; it would spell out the rights and obligations of sellers and buyers and would indicate the extent by which consumers suffer from adulteration, manipulation, fraud and inflationary price practices in the market place. It would inventory the adequacy of laws relating to packaging and labelling and to the establishment of standards for foods and other consumer necessities. It proposes that the Economic and Social Council appoint an Expert Group to prepare for consideration by the General Assembly a model code of consumer protection practices and that the United Nations General Assembly, in turn, recommend adoption of such a code by Member States and establish a Consumer Protection Agency to monitor the effectiveness of its programme. If the United Nations can bring within its purview the establishment of minimum labour standards to stop labour exploitation, it can surely tackle the equally important question of establishing basic consumer standards to prevent inflation, product adulteration, short weighting and the deception of the consumer.

Probably because women have been most directly victimized, women have played a major role in the consumer movement, as organizers, lobbyists, advisers to Governments and directors of consumers affairs bureaus where these exist. Women as leaders in this movement on an equal basis with men can by expanding their efforts to every part of the globe, help to ensure that basic necessities are kept at low prices, that high standards of equality are enforced in all services, goods and products, that weights and measures are accurate, that free and truly informed choice is available to every individual, that rights are protected and enforced in law against fraud, deceit, and market manipulation and that each person has a right to participation in making policies affecting consumer affairs on community, State and national levels. Women have recognized that the concept of development is meaningless except as it is related to the improvement of the quality of life.

The consumer movement has provided a springboard for women to enter into the mainstream of economic and political activity. It remains a springboard in developing and developed countries as a training ground to familiarize women with community, State, national and international economic realities. By involving themselves in this vital cause, women not only take a step out of stereotyped or traditional roles into leadership roles but are able to utilize their special knowledge gained over the centuries as homemakers to improve the human condition as a whole and to advance the cause of human rights of which consumer rights are an integral part.
