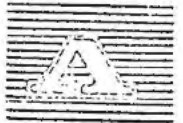


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PREPARATORY COMMITTEE OF THE WORLD
CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
DECADE FOR WOMEN, 1980

Vienna, 19-30 June 1978

Agenda items 3 and 5: Preparations for the Conference of 1980.
Other activities connected with the
Conference, including inputs by non-
governmental organizations.

Statement on implementation of the World Plan of Action to
realize the aims of International Women's Year submitted
by the Women's International Democratic Federation, a
non-governmental organization in category I status
with the Economic and Social Council

I

The problem of ensuring women's equality as one of the principles of democracy and of respect for human rights has acquired special urgency and meaning in the world today. Women realize this and are active participants in the struggle for its solution.

The International Women's Year, observed under the slogan Equality, Development, Peace, was a great event in international life that drew the attention of the United Nations, governments, and broad sections of the world public to the situation of women in society.

The active support given to International Women's Year both by the public and governments showed the important role of women in the world today and the recognition given to their contribution to the common struggle of the peoples for peace, national independence, democracy, social progress and the development of friendship and co-operation among nations. It confirmed, on the other hand, that the inequality between women and men in the great majority of countries is an acute social problem, and that its solution is an urgent task for the whole of society.

id.78-4160

The International Women's Year was marked by two major forums, the United Nations World Conference in Mexico City, with delegations from 133 states and from over a hundred non-governmental organizations participating in its work, and the World Congress in Berlin which was attended by about two thousand representatives of social organizations in 141 countries and 80 international organizations.

The Declaration and the World Plan of Action adopted at the Mexico Conference, and the documents of the Berlin World Congress and of many other meetings that took place in International Women's Year, condemn imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, fascism, zionism, apartheid and racial discrimination, call for action in favour of disarmament, demand socio-economic transformations and proclaim the need for full equality of men and women in rights, opportunities and responsibilities. The documents contain specific recommendations to governments, to intergovernmental and social organizations on eliminating the inequality of women and on integrating them, as active partners, in political, economic, cultural and social life, and they set concrete tasks for the ten-year period 1976-1985 to improve the status of women.

The decisions which were adopted in connection with International Women's Year convincingly demonstrate that the achievement of women's equality is inseparable from the strengthening of peace, national independence and democracy; they emphasize that the process of solving women's problems is closely linked with social progress and with ensuring a favourable international situation - improvement of the relations between states and respect for the principles of equal rights, respect for national sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of states, non-use of force or the threat of force - as well as with implementing the principles of peaceful co-existence and understanding among peoples; they reflect the growing participation of women in the movement for national liberation, against colonialism, against racism and apartheid, for full exercise of human rights.

The outcome of the International Women's Year, including the resolutions of the Mexico Conference, and questions pertaining to the status and the role of women in society were discussed at the 30th session of the United Nations General Assembly. The Assembly adopted a number of resolutions which reaffirm and develop the positive results of the Year.

A decision of the 30th session of the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the period of 1976 to 1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women. The purpose of the Decade is to implement the World Plan of Action and other important documents adopted

in the course of the International Women's Year designed to achieve real political, social, economic and cultural equality for women and to secure the fullest possible participation of women in the struggle for the strengthening of international peace and for disarmament, for the final elimination of all forms of colonialism and racism, for the achievement and consolidation of national independence, for respect for national sovereignty, for the development of co-operation and understanding among peoples, and for the establishment of a New International Economic Order which would give women in many countries more opportunities to participate in all spheres of social life.

These decisions met with warm approval on the part of the world public.

A practical step towards the realization of the Programme of the United Nations Decade for Women is the creation and activities of the International Committee for the United Nations Decade for Women which was set up on the basis of the Steering Committee of the World Congress in Berlin, consisting of representatives of international, regional and national non-governmental organizations and co-operating with the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

For each of the four main aspects of its activities -- peace and disarmament, problems of working women, elimination of illiteracy among women, the situation of children -- the Committee has worked out concrete programmes and begun implementing them.

The first important specific action of the Decade Committee is the preparation for and holding of a World Conference "For a Peaceful and Secure Future for All Children" in 1979 in connection with the International Year of the Child.

Convinced that the United Nations Decade for Women creates very favourable opportunities to further intensify action for the achievement of genuine equality of women, and to increase their role in the life of society, the Women's International Democratic Federation is actively participating in the work of the Decade Committee.

II

As a women's organization committed to implementing the World Plan of Action and the decisions of the World Congress, and fully aware of its responsibility for fulfilling the Prospective Plan of Activities adopted at its 7th Congress (Berlin, 1975), the Women's International Democratic Federation is determined to make the fullest

possible use of the United Nations Decade in order to achieve women's equality and ensure their full participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life of their countries.

In accordance with the Prospective Plan, the Women's International Democratic Federation has held various international and regional seminars: on the problems of rural women (Sofia, 1976); on the contribution of women and their organizations to the Latin American development process; the transnationals and their interference in development (Panama, 1977); on the role of women and their organizations in the struggle against colonialism, neo-colonialism, racial discrimination and apartheid, for national independence, democracy and peace (Conakry, 1977); on the tasks of women's organizations and other public forces in preparing for the International Year of the Child (Prague, 1977); on the situation of the child in Asia today (New Delhi, 1978); and in co-operation with other international women's organizations, on "Woman and World Disarmament" (Vienna, 1978).

In Luanda in 1978 a round-table meeting was held on the intensification of solidarity with the children, the women and the peoples of Southern Africa in their struggle for national liberation, independence, democracy, development and peace.

These events contributed to an objective analysis of the situation of women of different walks of life in many countries and helped map out future lines of action for their equality, taking into consideration the specific social conditions prevailing in these countries and regions.

A series of other seminars are planned to deal with different aspects of women's problems. The first of these will be in Budapest at the end of 1978 and will be devoted to the problems of working women.

The Women's International Democratic Federation shares the point of view formulated in the Preamble to the United Nations World Plan of Action that "There are significant differences in the status of women in different countries and regions of the world which are rooted in the political, economic and social structure, the cultural framework and the level of development of each country".

III

The observance of the International Women's Year and the adoption of the United Nations World Plan of Action stimulated actions to achieve women's equality in many countries.

The energetic action taken by broad sections of the public for implementation of the Programme of the United Nations Decade for Women resulted in some countries in the adoption of new laws establishing legally the equality of rights for women in the vocational and social spheres and granting women more rights in regard to marriage and family.

In a number of countries, the constitutions were amended to provide for equal rights in matters of employment. Governments as well as the public at large began to pay more attention to the problems of working women, who have become more active in the struggle for their rights. In recent years there has been fruitful co-operation between women's organizations and trade union, youth and other organizations and joint action has been taken for the improvement of the situation of women workers. As a result, practical measures have been taken in some countries to improve conditions of work for working women and to apply the principle of equal pay for equal work.

In the socialist countries, where the all-round personal development and equal rights of women are an essential part of the social system, new arrangements are constantly being made to ensure optimum conditions for women to combine their responsibilities as mothers, workers and citizens. This corresponds to the interests of women themselves and of society as a whole.

Much work was done in many countries to eliminate illiteracy among women, to improve their professional skills, to draw women into production, and to improve living and working conditions for women, especially in rural areas.

But the Women's International Democratic Federation and its national organizations are fully aware that concrete measures in the interests of women have not been taken in all the countries where the need is really urgent. A number of acute social problems still exist, and immediate action is required to solve them within the framework of the United Nations Decade for Women.

Problems still awaiting solution in many countries of the world include equal pay for equal work, the access of women to all kinds of education, professional training and re-training, guaranteed employment for women conforming to their skills, the right to social security, and recognition and exercise of the right of access to culture. Working women in many countries are faced with an extremely acute problem of combining their professional activities with their function as mothers, coupled with that of

protection for mother and child. The problems connected with improving the status of rural women are likewise in urgent need of solution. Special attention should also be given to the problem of eliminating discrimination against girls and young women.

Many countries are in great need of improved family and marriage laws and of legal and actual equality of rights for women in society.

While many countries have enacted new laws modifying the legal status of women, and many have ratified international instruments on ensuring women's equality, most of these documents are a long way from being implemented because the means to guarantee such implementation are lacking.

It should be emphasized that, in the case of women in a number of countries, the first years of the United Nations Decade have not brought progress in the achievement of their actual equality. On the contrary, these years have been marked by a further worsening of their situation, which was already difficult enough. The growth of unemployment, the rising cost of living, inflation, the constant growth of military spending in many countries - all this is a heavy burden for working women and their families. The acute economic crisis, which affects a large number of countries, results in the continuation of the actual inequality of women and places further obstacles in the way of implementation of the principles of equal rights.

Every day millions of women have to face such problems as the high cost of medical assistance, the aggravation of the housing crisis, the acute shortage of pre-school child care institutions, the feeling of insecurity and lack of prospects for young people. Women of the world are coming to realize more and more that achieving a lasting peace, the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons, prohibition of the production of the neutron bomb and the development and manufacture of new types and systems of weapons of mass destruction, the achievement of disarmament and advancing the process of political and military détente constitute a vital problem for mankind and a necessary condition for promoting women's rights.

Particular concern is caused by the situation of women in those countries where democratic freedoms and the rights of the individual have been trampled under foot, where the regime of racial discrimination and apartheid deprives the majority of the population of all rights, and where fascist and dictatorial regimes continue to exist.

IV

The Women's International Democratic Federation deems it necessary

- to intensify, together with all other women's organizations, with all progressive forces the struggle for peace and disarmament, ending the arms race, banning the development and production of the neutron bomb as well as other new types and systems of weapons of mass destruction; for the reduction of military budgets and use of the funds thus released for solving socio-economic problems;
- to intensify actions in solidarity with the women's organizations of countries fighting for their national independence; with all the fighters against fascism and reaction, for democracy and social progress;
- to support the young states that have taken the road of independent development through efforts to establish a New International Economic Order based on justice that would give the women of many countries more opportunities to participate in all spheres of the life of society;
- to expand, at the national level, the mass campaign for the economic, social, political and cultural rights of women;
- to urge governments to implement the recommendations contained in the World Plan of Action, to ratify and apply the international instruments on the advancement of women and, in particular, to ratify and apply the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights;
- to give new impetus to the work of the existing national committees and commissions which were set up in connection with the International Women's Year. To set up such bodies in those countries where they have not yet been established, and to include in them representatives of public organizations for the purpose of co-ordinating the implementation of national programmes drawn up for the United Nations Decade for Women;
- to proceed at the national, regional and international levels with preparatory work for the 1980 United Nations World Conference and urge governments to incorporate the three goals of the United Nations Decade for Women - equality, development, peace - in the evaluation of the progress already made and in the preparation of a programme for the second half of the Decade;

- to unite the efforts of women's organizations and movements with those of trade union organizations, professional associations and youth organizations for the purpose of solving the problems of women workers and improving the situation of young women.

While appreciating the contribution of the United Nations and its specialized agencies to the realization of International Women's Year goals, the Women's International Democratic Federation nonetheless believes that the United Nations system should apply more effort to the implementation of the World Plan of Action. This applies, above all, to the regional United Nations Economic and Social Commissions which are to co-ordinate and carry out specific activities designed to improve the situation of women in all respects.

The Women's International Democratic Federation would welcome the holding of regional conferences on women's problems which could be convened prior to the 1980 United Nations World Conference.

The Women's International Democratic Federation and its national organizations in 114 countries look forward to the United Nations General Assembly adopting, as soon as possible, a Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

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The present Memorandum will be supplemented by documents* submitted by the national organizations of the Women's International Democratic Federation. They show the actual situation of women in different countries of the world and those problems that require immediate and concerted action by the international community as a whole.

* The supplementary documents are now being prepared and will be sent when completed.