



**UNITED
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A



**World Conference
of the United Nations
Decade for Women:**

Equality, Development and Peace

A/CONF.94/STATEMENTS/COUNTRIES

**Copenhagen, Denmark
14-30 July 1980**

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WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN

ADDRESS BY

MRS. JUSTICE ANNIE RUTH JIAGGE

APPEAL COURT JUDGE, CHAIRMAN OF THE GHANA
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT,
AND LEADER OF THE GHANA DELEGATION

TO THE

WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE
FOR WOMEN, COPENHAGEN, DENMARK, 14-30 JULY 1980

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Madam President,

It is my pleasure to congratulate you on behalf of my delegation on your election as president. The Conference is indeed fortunate to have you guide its work. Women in your country have already achieved what women in other countries are still struggling for. Here in your country is a good example of what can be achieved when women are given the same opportunities as men. The struggle for justice is by no means at an end not even in your country but what has been achieved here is an inspiration to others in the struggle for justice.

This conference in your country is of special significance, for Zimbabwe is here. This fact is the greatest single achievement since Mexico. The struggle for Elimination of Discrimination against women is a struggle for justice and cannot be divorced from the struggle against racism and oppression. Justice is one and indivisible - victory in the struggle against racism and oppression is also a victory in the struggle for equal opportunities. Discrimination against women and racism are two sides of the same coin - both deny justice. My delegation would like to use this opportunity to welcome Zimbabwe. May Namibia and South Africa achieve the same victory in the near future. Ghana was happy to sign the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against women. At independence, Ghana pledged to defend Freedom and Justice. The going has not been easy but Ghana holds firmly to its pledge and will continue the struggle until victory is won. The convention is a measure to defend freedom and justice

My delegation would like to congratulate the Secretary-General of the Conference for the extensive arrangements made to ensure the greatest success. A job well done is its own reward and may this Conference bring to our Secretary-General - Mrs. Lucille Mair - the joy and satisfaction of a job well done.

1975, the International Women's Year saw the birth or establishment by the Government of Ghana of the National Council on Women and Development. For the first time in the history of Ghana, a government machinery was set up to accelerate the elimination of discrimination against women on the ground of sex. The Government of Ghana considered this machinery necessary if women were to enjoy equal economic, social political and cultural rights defacto with men.

There are no discriminatory laws on the statute books of Ghana but discrimination exists all the same. Women in theory, have access to education at all levels on equal basis with men. In practice however, the higher you go in the educational ladder the fewer women you find. It becomes the duty of the NCWD to investigate and find out why the situation is what it is. Decisions that looked innocent at first sight were exposed as very fine and subtle forms of discrimination against women. For instance, it came to the notice of the NCWD that one of the top High schools in the country required higher performance at the entrance examination for girls than for boys to qualify for admission to the school. This matter was taken up with the Headmaster. To him it was not a matter of discrimination, it was a question of practical convenience since there were more houses for boys than for girls. — ^{THIS} co-educational institution with an enviable record in offering equal educational opportunities to boys and girls, provided more houses for boys than for girls and was not even aware that it was being discriminatory until the matter was raised.

Similarly, very few women continue to be appointed to decision making bodies even though the 1979 Constitution provides for national integration and unity without discrimination on the ground of place of origin, ethnic origin, sex or religion. Each time Government appointments to decision making bodies are made, the NCWD points out the inadequate representation of women on these bodies.

The NCWD compiled a list of qualified women stating clearly the special expertise and experience of each woman and presented the list to the government. The efforts of the NCWD are being rewarded with more appointments of women in key positions. However, the position taken by the NCWD is that at least 1/3 of people appointed to decision making bodies should be women. This was the target set in the first half of the International Women's Decade. There was a definite move forward but nowhere near the target which has to be carried into the 2nd half of the decade.

The directive principles of the new Ghana constitution 1979 provide for equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law for every citizen of Ghana. Another section of the Constitution provides that any citizen of Ghana who feels this his constitutional rights have been infringed can bring an action in court against the authority that infringed these rights.

Traditional, and customary practices discriminate against women on the ground of sex. It is to be hoped that women will bring action against the relevant authority guilty of discrimination against them.

The experience so far however, has been that women will suffer great injustice rather than vindicate their rights in the courts. This is, I think, part of the inhibitions created in women over years of suppression and injustice. Experience has shown that women can get over such inhibitions.

The dehumanising effect of poverty is one of the greatest discriminatory factors ever known. In Ghana, the poorest illiterates are women. The aim of the NCWD is to raise the standard of living on a broad national basis by bringing into the productive sector of the economy the unskilled who are mainly women and to integrate them in the development process at all levels.

After the Mexico Conference in 1975 the NCWD prepared and presented to the Government a 10-year Plan of Action, based on the Mexico Plan but adapted to meet the needs of Ghana. Government's reaction to the plan was to instruct the various Ministries, Departments and other establishments to cooperate with the National Council on Women and Development in the implementation of the Plan.

The NCWD realised that its work can be effective only when it is ~~Seized~~ with the full facts of the situation of women in Ghana today. Knowledge of historical and cultural antecedents that affect the present position of women is relevant for⁹ clear understanding of the problems in order to decide on the method of approach and the appropriate strategy for securing the necessary solutions.

A comprehensive programme of research was drawn up. The Council's own research unit and selected individuals and institutions were given specific areas of research to work on. After a period of 18 months, a Seminar was organised (Sept. 1978) to receive and discuss the research findings. Among the subjects of research were issues relating to health, education, employment agriculture and women and appropriate technology. Recommendations based on the research findings were made to government.

At the request of the NCWD, officers of its Regional Secretariats and Advisory Committees discussed the 10-year Plan of Action with various women's groups in rural and urban areas. The feed-back to the Council was a clear call from the women of Ghana for education in the field of income generating activities. For many women in the rural areas, the main problem is where the next meal is coming from.

The Council in response organised a country-wide crash programme of workshops to teach new skills and revive old ones. To many women, however, the new skills were at best, a second string to the bow. Their overriding desire was to earn more in the traditional occupations and trades that had been in the families for generations.

To meet the need, the Council identified four major areas of women's traditional occupations for study. These are agriculture, food processing, production of soap and crafts especially pottery and basketery. The study revealed that the traditional methods of work were not only inefficient and time-consuming but often so exacting and such a drain on the physical resources of the body, that premature old age was the lot of many of our women. In spite of this heavy toll on the body, production was low but the demand for the goods produced was very high.

The NCWD conducted a country-wide search for new ideas and found that there was enough suitable local material to upgrade traditional methods of work to be more productive and less burdensome. The idea was to introduce simple and appropriate technology wherever desirable and also to introduce scientific principles on the level of understanding of our women.

It was realised that the efforts to introduce new ideas would be futile unless there was full cooperation from the women. The fear that the new ideas might be rejected was real but the promise was so great that it could not be ignored and the plunge was made. The women were involved right from the thinking stage and they grew more and more enthusiastic as they realised the possibilities in the new ideas. Women's groups spoke freely of the problems and the back-breaking labour of their occupations and there was real communication between the NCWD team and the women selected for the study.

Reports from the regions that our women were not opposed to new ideas, encouraged the Council to take bold decisions on mechanising the most tedious parts of the traditional method of work. The first idea to be tested was a factory for the production of gari (dehydrated grated cassava). The women in the village chosen for the test were at that time producing 200 bags (50kgs. weight each) of gari every week. A local manufacturer had some equipment that was found suitable. The women examined the equipment and decided to try them. At their request adjustments were made. All the equipment (except the graters) are hand operated and the graters are driven by small diesel engines. With financial assistance from the Government of Ghana and a friendly country, the first women's cooperative gari factory was built and equipped. The women who are either illiterates and semi-literates have mastered the use of the machine and are happy with them. Meanwhile the production of gari in the area rose from 200 bags to over 1000 bags a week. The women are confident that they can produce 2000-3000 bags a week in the near future.

The gari factory was officially commissioned by Dr. Hilla Limann, President of the Republic of Ghana on the 11th of July 1980. It was a happy example of what can be achieved when men, women and children all get involved in efforts to make life worth living. The men in the village have formed themselves into a cassava growers association and have greatly increased the acreage under cassava cultivation to keep the factory in full production.

In September this year, God willing, another women's cooperative factory will be commissioned for the production of potash for the production of soap. The potash has succeeded in reducing the time for the manufacture of soap in the traditional way from 3 or 4 days to a matter of 15 minutes.

Similar women's cooperative factories are scheduled to be inaugurated in all the regions of Ghana.

In agriculture, women's cooperatives are taking advantage of the government tractor hire services. Agricultural extension officers have been assigned to the women's cooperatives to give advise and impart new knowledge.

Wherever women have got over the problems of basic needs they start showing interest in what is happening around them. They regain their self confidence and self respect which were shattered by poverty. The new prosperity becomes visible on the children as they are better fed and clothed.

Development in Ghana in the 2nd half of the decade will go along similar lines. The new emphasis will be on the establishment of Common Service Centres to provide opportunities for literacy classes, cultural and recreational activities, lessons in home-science, child welfare, family planning and so on.

The work of the NCWD during the past five years was most rewarding. Within the past five years, women's cooperatives have undertaken agricultueal, industrial and commercial ventures and there has been an increase in their earning capacity. This modest measure of prosperity where it exist, is visible on the children who look better fed and better clothed.

Finally I would like to express my delegation's sincere thanks to Her Majesty the Queen and the Government of Denmark for hosting the Conference.

Thank You.