

REPORTS ON PROJECTS AND SEMINARS

THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION OF WOMEN

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In an unprecedented and historical meeting of almost 15,000 women in Nairobi, Kenya, the United Nations marked the end of the International Decade of Women. Two conferences, governmental and non-governmental, were convened to assess the decade's accomplishments, with regard to the themes set, namely, Equality, Development and Peace.

The Non-governmental Organization Forum (NGO), scheduled 1,000 workshops within an eight-day period, setting the frantic pace for the delegates who had to care for their own workshops and to sit in others that caught their interest.

From the very start, the NGO Conference, called FORUM '85 was already hounded by events that reflected the circumstances surrounding the true status of women in the world today. For example, there were clear pronouncements from the organizers that the women should steer clear of political issues and should limit themselves to purely women problems. The angry reply from progressive delegates was that women's problems were political in nature and therefore it was inevitable that political issues would be brought out. In eclectic workshops ranging from breastfeeding, to prostitution, to revolutionary struggles, delegates evaluated the UN countries' gains and losses in the past ten years.

Equality

In the last few years, more and more women have come to realize that society treats them structurally and systematically different from men. The main consequence of this "other treatment" is that women have relatively less freedom to arrange their lives according to their own wishes. There is therefore an unequal balance of power between men and women manifesting itself in various

*WATCH—Mindanao Chairperson and GABRIELA—Mindanao Council member. A talk given to students of the Ateneo de Davao University on the occasion of the Literacy Week, Oct. 2-5, 1985.

levels of societal and personal life. For instance, women work indoors and outdoors. Indoors: doing housework, rearing children, feeding them, washing, cooking, cleaning, etc. Outdoors: working in the factory, teaching in school, selling in the market, being employed in an office, etc. Yet despite these, women are NOT a social power of any importance. Many of their tasks are unpaid and unrecognized. In Third World countries, including the Philippines, peasant women are expected to help in the weeding, planting, harvesting, tending of a vegetable garden, raising livestock, aside from rearing the children and housekeeping. Yet their contribution to farm and production is largely uncompensated. Among middle class women in the Philippine society, we see housewives employed in the offices at the same time earning extra on the side by doing a little buy and sell business. Her efforts may result to her getting higher income or bringing home bigger pay compared to that of her husband. Yet she is considered a secondary wage earner.

The widespread concept that women are supplementary income earners has further hindered women's struggle for higher pay and equal opportunities in promotion. That women are secondary wage earners is really a myth, for lately, with more and more men being laid off, more and more women have become the major or only wage-earners. Coupled with the woman's inherent resourcefulness and initiative, her salary plus other income may result in a higher take home pay than that of her husband.

Education wise, throughout much of the developing world, school is still considered a luxury to be enjoyed primarily by boys. Although worldwide it is reported that school attendance by girls has risen, still when choices are made as to who gets educated first, the girls have to bow to traditional home decisions that boys have the priority. At present when tuition fees have soared beyond the capabilities of low-income families, many girls will be made to drop out of school.

Unequal opportunities are also the lot of women. In a workshop on working women, some issues were raised: Why is it that multinational companies not only prefer to employ women in their factories but are also increasingly making use of homeworking? Why is an advanced technology being coupled with a pre-industrial form of labor? Why do women, irrespective of their level of education, get recruited into low-skilled and low-paying jobs?

The women who tried to answer these questions countered by saying that the value of women's work is defined by an ideology which circumscribes their role in the family and by male definitions of femininity. Whereas men are given the status of "real" workers outside the home, the "breadwinner" role which renders them the titular "head of the household, women's work and attitudes are redirected by their supposed primary roles as wives, mothers, and careers. Even many of their professional roles — in schools, hospitals, and the social services — are seen as extensions of their roles as teachers of their own children, nurses at home, and careers of the home and hearth. Although they have vital tasks in any society, they are generally undervalued and underpaid. In this way, women's subordinates position is sustained through their financial dependence on a higher male income.

Seeing women's role as domestic also contributes to justify inadequate education and training facilities and lack of promotion for women. They are not supposed to mind boring and repetitive jobs and are supposed to be unsuited to the acquisition of "trained skills."

Women who lose their jobs in factories are often unwilling or unable to return to their families in the provinces. They remain in the areas around the factories. For lack of income, they are forced into prostitution as their only means of survival.

The issue inequality is most blatant in the case of women's situation in the labor market. Filipino women constitute more than half of our 56 million population. But until now, they comprise only 1/3 of the recognized labor force. Housework is not counted in the computation of the GNP. In Europe, there is an ongoing movement to recognize housework as part of the productive labor force and to seek compensation from the government for these efforts. These European women announced that on October 24 they will leave their homes, leave their children in the care of a few women, and they will stay in the park not doing any washing, cooking, cleaning or any other housework for at least one day if only to dramatize the importance of housework.

Last week, I saw on TV, a short film clip on housework and how such a particular household task would cost if we were to put a price tag on it. For example, it enumerated certain tasks and the equivalent amount they deserve: tutoring a grade schooler on his homework, so many dollars; taking care of a sick baby, so many dollars; ironing the husband's shirts; another set of dollars; and so on and so forth. The amount totaled was staggering, supporting the claim that housework is that valuable and that underestimated.

In its Nairobi report, NEWSWEEK magazine says that today, women perform 2/3 of the world's work but earn only 1/100 of its income and own less than 1/100 of its property. Representing half of the world's population, women still remain bound by cultural, political and economic constraints that prevent them from becoming full equals of men. Nowhere is women's burden heavier than in the Third World; which brings us to the second theme of the decade, development.

Development

Here in Mindanao where rural areas are highly underdeveloped, women wage a desperate war against the incursion of multinational companies and the consequences of their profit hungry activities. In areas which have been hamletted or bombed chemically, the forced evacuations have caused loss of land and property and even loss of lives. In cases where husbands or other male members of the family have been arrested, detained or even salvaged, many women have been forced to become major wage-earners for their families and at the same time to follow-up cases of those arrests and detentions. Poverty is so common that many young women have gone to the city or urban centers in the hope of finding jobs but often end up as exploited domestic help or worse, as hostesses in bars and nightclubs, or even prostitutes in military bases and tourist belts.

In the name of development, Third World countries prostitute, literally and figuratively, their natural and human resources. The tourism business in our country wittingly or unwittingly promotes the exploitation and degradation of women and children alike. In military bases, in tourist spots in Metro Manila, and in resorts like Puerto Galera or Buracay, children from 9 to 14 years of age fall prey to the evil needs of European and Japanese men who take advantage of the extreme poverty of the people. If this is not sanctioned by our government, why do we have offices that give licenses to these prostitutes? Why are there free VD clinics to check the hospitality girls? In its new pursuit of the all-powerful dollar, the Marcos administration has wittingly or unwittingly encouraged prostitution in all forms — mail order brides, tourism hospitality girls, even overseas employment.

Also in the name of development, there is a new phenomenon in the world today called the international division of labor. The last 15 years have seen growing internationalization of industries that traditionally depended heavily on women's work, such as the textile and garment industry, electronics factories, and miscellaneous manufacturers which include toys, sports goods, etc. Women are now working worldwide in a global assembly line: from the Levi Strauss factory in Tennessee, USA to the Levi Strauss Jeans Factory in Glasgow, Scotland to the Levi Strauss factory in Manila. Then there is the electronic chip plant in Silicon Valley, California, to the micro-chip plant in Silicon Geln, Scotland to the micro-chip plant in the Penang Free Trade Zone in Malaysia. Large firms such as Sony, Philipps, and Motorola have relocated their production from the first world to a select group of third world countries. Governments of third world countries play an active role here. They set up free trade zones to attract the off-shore assembly firms to produce under sub-contract for the first world. It is interesting to note, however, that the important stages of production are in the first world while the function of *assembling* only is given to the third world factories. Let's take the case of the micro electronic components industry. The work of designing and fabricating the chips is retained in the first world countries. It is the labor intensive process of assembling the chips into wiring harnesses to make components which is relocated to the third world. The capacity to initiate technological change in the industry remains largely in USA and Japan.

Today, for women working worldwide in labor intensive factory jobs, divisions are created by the ever-present possibility of jobs being relocated. The threat is "If you don't accept the wages and conditions we offer, and produce the output we require, then we will lose orders, and we will close down, we will move elsewhere." Because the women are numerous and eager to keep the jobs they need badly, they become willing to work twice as hard for a smaller fraction of the wages. American women are set in competition with Mexican women pitted against those in Southeast Asia; those in Southeast Asia against those in China. The irony is that everywhere, women are designated as cheap labor in comparison to men. They are regarded as less skilled, although they have "nimble outbursts" and had better be discouraged from joining unions, "just in case."

Although the global assembly line does in some ways divide women, it also gives women some things in common. They are exploited in these assembly lines. Poverty in the third world countries has forced women to take and guard any jobs they get — therefore high production targets are imposed, long working hours required, low wages endured, harsh working conditions experienced as management techniques characterized by patriarchy and racism are patiently endured by these women who need the jobs badly. Even very harsh working conditions that threaten their health are undergone by women who need to be able to continue working. For example in a factory in Barnsley, England, which makes tennis balls, women workers were poisoned by chemical fumes. Six hundred altogether were affected and 24 were made to stay in the hospital for some time. In India, asbestos workers have very few anti-pollution or dust control measures. Here in the Philippines, a similar asbestos factory has been accused of not providing safety measures for its workers. In most factories especially in electronic plants, the areas are very clean. This is not out of concern for the workers but to keep the products clean. In most Export Processing Zones, such as in Malaysia, India and Thailand, the health risks are so great for workers that most women are laid off when they are about 23 years old. It means they have reached the end of their capacity to work. These are usually women in heavy duty garment factories. In Hongkong, a study was done in 1981 on electronic workers. It was found that 90.2% of those using microscopes had eye strains, and those who had been working there for a long time were in danger of losing their eyesight. They were all women.

The Philippine government's report on the status of women shows that more women have been employed these past ten years compared to the period before 1975. It is true, but what kind of work have they gotten into? A British manufacturing company established in the Bataan Processing Zone has materials coming from Hongkong but the labor is Filipino. Why? At least ten Filipino workers can be had for the price of one British worker. This is supposed to be development, but for whom? So much is invested in projects that enhance the prestige or tourism of a third world country, but little attention is given to basic services like water system, transportation, health care and the like.

Peace

To stress the theme of *Peace*, a peace tent was set up in the University of Nairobi campus, the site of the Conference. Easily one of the most popular places in the area, it accommodated discussions, debates, spontaneous sharing, formal press conferences and informal dialogues on the controversial issue of *Peace*. The universality of this topic affecting so many women in many countries today, drew a lot of support so much so that on the third day of the Conference, the Kenyan Government, threatened to close it down. Only when the NGO Coordinator, Dame Nita Barrows threatened that if the Peace Tent were closed down she would close down the entire Forum, did harassments of the Peace Tent stop. However, the number of military men in plain clothes tripled in the following days.

This kind of action is typical of numerous events manifesting the many faces of militarization in liberationist countries today. State violence against women is rampant but is most intensely felt in countries for genuine liberation. In Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chile, Guatemala, Erytria, Zimbabwe and in our Philippines, more and more women are uniting and openly fighting the effects of militarization in their own nations. Yet peace is a ticklish issue. The Philippine government's report did not include any details about peace. In a sincere attempt to explain the true condition of Filipino women specially in highly militarized areas like Mindanao, GABRIELA, presented a special report on peace entitled, "Peace Is An Illusion." Cutting across all sectors of Philippine society, the issue of peace is a dream most avidly desired by the sectors. The peasant women are losing land, property, husbands, children, and brothers in their fight for survival against elements such as the military, paramilitary units, and armed fanatical groups.

The labor sector encounters the force and might of military power as they exercise their right to strike, picket, or express their grievance against an unjust and unfair management. The crackdown on labor continues as more and more workers who are suffering under the intensifying economic crisis are airing their legitimate demands. The urban poor women are in constant fear for their own safety as well as that of their families as raids, zoning, strafings, and salvaging become ordinary occurrences in communities.

Tribal Filipino women suffer in the hands of military forces who come with the incursion of multinational companies that grab their tribal land and destroy their indigenous way of life. Teachers have the National Service Law to contend with, and the students, increasing campus militarization. Even church women are not exempted from the regime's harassment and repression as more and more religious women who are involved in mass actions are accused as leftist organizers of innocent people. The middle class women who used to enjoy some amount of comfort in their lives are now the nation's *nouveau* poor not the *nouveau* rich, as they become direct and indirect victims of the regime's repression. When we look around and see children dying from hunger it is not only a scandal but a grave mortal sin against God and the people.

Peace is truly an illusion in the Philippines. In a country that has more than 750 recorded political detainees, more than a hundred are women. This tragic state I have become personally involved in since the arrest of my husband, and since I joined FREEDOM. In Bicutan, political prisoners are called public order violators, a clear indication of the regime's denial of the existence of political prisoners.

The End Results of the Forum

It is unfortunate that the United Nations did not look at the non-governmental forum as a meeting of the minds so significant as to warrant a plenary session with a synthesis and a collation of resolution. In the absence of this, women delegates, nevertheless agreed to meet again five years from now to assess

once again their decision to implement concrete programs that sprung from their decade get-together. The consciousness-raising will have to give way to specific action to ensure women's health, economic quality, true development, political clout, and genuine liberation. The solidarity expressed by women from the first world countries for the struggle of the third world was truly inspiring and the warm embrace of statehood by other liberationist countries was enough to assure the women that they are not fighting a lonely battle against oppression and exploitation.

We, in the Philippines should begin to cast away the centuries old feudal traditions that tied us to home, that limited our growth, and that reinforced the feudal, patriarchal mentality that women are dependent on men, and inferior to them. We should join other women who have awakened to the reality that unless they participate in the struggle against all forms of domination and oppression, we cannot attain dignity and true freedom. If we are concerned not only about our own happiness but also that of our children, and their children after them we have to take our place in the national struggle for liberation. The decade just ended, but for us, the task of building a new nation is just beginning. The forces of imperialism must be banished from our shores for they will dehumanize not only the women, but even our own men. Together with other Filipinos advocating democracy, nationalism and independence, let us all be one in our struggle for true change.

THE EAPI SUMMER COURSE ON THE PASTORAL MINISTRY TO YOUTH

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Ninety participants attended the 1985 East Asian Pastoral Institute Summer Course on Youth Ministry in Manila, May 13-June 14, 1985. Of these, 39 were male Asians, 11 male non-Asians; 32 female Asians and 8 female non-Asians; comprising 31 Priests, 6 Brothers, 27 Sisters and 26 Lay Persons. According to nationalities, 50 came from the Philippines, 15 from the Fiji Islands, 9 from Malaysia, 3 from Indonesia, 2 each from Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand, and one each from Hongkong, India, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Saipan, and Zambia.

The course started with a general orientation during which delegates introduced themselves, and group needs and resources surfaced. After the participants had expressed their own perception of their country's youth, a profile of Asian