

“Quote, Unquote”

A selection of inspiring quotations from various sources on women's issues and concerns

Reflections on the Beijing Conference experience by Kay Henry, a member of the Women in International Development Group (Harvard/MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA):

“I have never liked to resort to gender-based generalities, as in ‘women are from Venus, men are from Mars’ (or, as a recent book title expresses it, ‘Women are from Paris, Men are from Detroit’). However, there does seem to be something to those clichés. For example, take Deborah Tannen’s notion, as explained in [her book] *You Just Don’t Understand*, that men tend to emphasize hierarchy and women tend to emphasize cooperation. In Beijing, I saw cooperation — usually earnest, patient cooperation — daily. There was so much information, and so many questions, that we had to rely on informal networks rather than formal news sources. If you didn’t know the location of a meeting, you asked the first woman you saw, and she would tell you whatever she knew. Even the informal networking process had a different flavor from the ‘let’s do lunch’ mentality we’re accustomed to [in America]. If you exchanged cards with someone, it was usually because you genuinely wanted to keep in touch. One woman gave me her boss’s card with an address in Malaysia, saying ‘I think you and she each have information that the other could use. Please get in touch with her.’ The emphasis was less upon selling oneself — something we do far too much of [in the US.] — and more on sincere interest in each other’s work; less on ‘what can I get out of this?’ and more upon ‘what can we offer each other?’.....Here are a few random memories from the conference: A woman from Rwanda lost 40 family members in the recent ethnic conflict, including a dozen who were killed before her eyes. Her message: ‘We have to stop the cycle of vengeance!’.....A Kenyan woman and an American woman cross paths in a parking lot and begin a conversation. The Kenyan woman offers her card; she is starting a rape crisis center in Nairobi. ‘I was raped once,’ says the American woman. ‘Someone tried to rape me, but I escaped,’ replies the Kenyan. With tears in their eyes, they embrace as a taxi pulls up to take the Kenyan woman to the airport. Women from half a dozen countries, over the course of two days, say to me in independent conversations, ‘If the world is going to be saved, women are going to save it!’.

from *WIDNews*, October 1995

From a Statement to the Fourth World Conference on Women presented by the Twenty-First Century Values Committee:

“We speak for those who are suffering, for those who believe in a better future, and for all those who see the need for change. What we propose is nothing less than a revolution in consciousness. We want to stand as fully integrated human beings who take responsibility for what is happening in our world, now and into the next century. Many

people feel that spiritual concepts and language cannot be used in official documents and presentations. Such concepts, they feel, may be misconstrued to support religious or social dogmas which cause oppression of some members of society, and which sound conservative, fundamentalist or discriminatory. We call upon you today to suspend your judgments about spirituality and examine those values which we feel to be the keys to the future of humanity. No two entities in this universe are identical, yet all are sacred. All have intrinsic worth and existential value. It is in the realization of their sacredness that we find our deepest sense of oneness with them. It is in the realization of their sacredness that we find our commitment to them. The existence of a blade of grass, a thousand year old tree, a hundred year old woman — all are valuable, all are spiritual, all are inalienable members of our vast universal family in our global village. The essential values for the twenty-first century are those at the core of the human heart. They include, but are not limited to: love, honesty, trustworthiness, dignity, compassion and service. When practiced in daily life, they break the cycles of revenge and violence that are destroying human life at all levels, from the family to the nations. [These values] also foster the far-sightedness required to protect our fragile environment and to repair the damage already done....Women and children represent 75 percent of the world’s population and are as such the largest constituency on the planet. They have almost nothing to say in designing the economic and political structures in which they live. This must change. A twenty-first century paradigm must actively include this 75 percent of humanity at the center of all strategies and policies....Respect and accountability, good administration, selflessness and forgiveness, tolerance and compassion, are the essential ingredients for any just and healthy society. The accumulated wisdom of the ages must now be brought to bear by women on the shaping of the future. We have hope: Hope born of women’s experience of suffering, and the power that comes from the transformation of that suffering....Our hope will bear fruit when women, for the first time, become real protagonists in creating global history.”

From a speech given by feminist activist Bella Abzug in Beijing:

“Change is not about simply mainstreaming women. It is not about women joining a polluted stream. Change is about cleaning the stream, changing stagnant pools into fresh, flowing waters. Our struggle is about resisting the slide into a morass of anarchy, violence, intolerance, inequality and injustice. Our struggle is about reversing the trends of social, economic and ecological crisis. For women in the struggle for equality, there are many paths to the mountain top...Our struggle is about creating sustainable lives and attainable dreams. Our struggle is about creating violence-free families. And then, violence-free streets. Then, violence-free borders. For us to realize these dreams, we must keep our heads in the clouds and our feet on the ground.”

Women's Environment and Development Organization,
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From a New York Times article on "First Woman Advocate at the UN":

"Not long after Rosario Green arrived at the United Nations a couple of years ago, she was distracted one day while walking along a corridor by the sound of sobbing. A woman in a telephone booth was telling a friend she was being harassed by her boss and she did not know where to turn. Ms. Green, a Mexican diplomat who is no stranger to machismo, remembers hesitating, but then walking away because she felt she had no right to interfere. But she said she thought to herself that sooner or later there would have to be a system to help a victim like this. Two years later, Ms. Green, now Assistant Secretary General for political affairs, is the highest ranking woman in the United Nations Secretariat, and may be in a position to make a significant difference. At the end of November, UN Secretary General Butros Butros-Ghali named Ms. Green the first coordinator of all women's issues in the United Nations system, ranging from working conditions to the role of women in UN programs world-wide. A Mexican banker who has watched Ms. Green's career unfold said she knows the territory, after a difficult climb to positions of influence in Mexico's Foreign Ministry. 'She's tough, but gentle,' the banker said.

And that, Ms. Green said, is part of the problem. Women in diplomacy have to learn to walk a fine line between assertiveness and diffidence, 'while men can just be themselves. If you become very

assertive or very aggressive, because men are not paying attention to your ideas, then you are also not taken into account because you are too tough,' she said. 'Men lose their tempers quite often, and that is just an event. In a woman's case, that [loss of temper] becomes a description, a label.'

There is a touch of sarcasm in her voice when she considers at what late date the world has finally concluded that the role of women may be the most crucial in social development. 'I don't know how we have survived so many years by thinking of women as a separate chapter,' she said. 'We are not a separate chapter. We are half the book.'

— Barbara Crossette, *New York Times International*, February 16, 1996

From the Writings of Ibn Rushd ("Averroes"), a Muslim philosopher who lived in Andalusia during the 12th century, A.D.:

"We hide the woman in the home and limit her activities to housework and caring for children. Hence, she becomes quite limited in her thinking and experience. If only women were given the same opportunities for study and growth that are available to men, they would be much different than we now find them, and would indeed be capable of competing successfully with men in intellectual activities and productions."

(We encourage readers to submit items for "Quote / Unquote".)



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