

Libyan President Mu'ammarr El-Qadhafi, an Ardent Champion of Women's Liberation

A devout Muslim, Colonel Qadhafi believes that fundamental Islamic laws grant women all the rights and liberties claimed by modern feminists. The forms of oppression imposed on Muslim women nowadays were developed in the period of decadence and stagnation which followed the heady days of Muslim expansion. With the recent awakening of Arabs and Muslims, Qadhafi believes that women should recuperate the liberties which they have lost as a result of men's ignorance of and deviation from true Muslim principles.

On the occasion of the September celebrations commemorating the Libyan Revolution, Colonel Qadhafi delivered a speech in which he declared his feminist views in the following terms: "The news I intend to break will not easily be accepted. It is not an ordinary item nor a passing whim. It is the beginning of the end of the harem era, the era of female slaves, and the beginning of women's liberation in the Arab world. It is a bullet that will shake the area, compel the palace prisoners, those slaves of trade markets, to rebel against their executioners, their enslavers and their exploiters."

As a sign of his enthusiastic support of women's cause, when Colonel Qadhafi read the monograph written by Sheikh Subhi As-Saleh on **Woman in Islam**, published by IWSAW, 1980, he was so pleased with the positive treatment of the subject that he requested the Libyan Chargé d'Affaires in Beirut, to buy 100 copies of the book for the generous sum of LL. 5000, more than eight times the official selling price.

Another sign of his sincere interest in women's promotion is his inclusion into the Libyan labor code, of laws granting a number of privileges to the working woman. As an example, maternity leaves have been extended to three months at full pay, while allowing for the right of longer leaves at half pay for cause.

Also, another indication of his feminist enthusiasm is his call to women from all Arab countries to join the Military Academy of Libya, where they would receive the same military training as men and could prepare themselves to share in future liberation campaigns.

It is hoped that President Qadhafi's liberal views will help to produce favorable reactions in other Arab countries.

World Food Day, 16 October 1981⁽¹⁾

"World Food Day can, and should, develop a sense of national and international solidarity in the struggle against hunger, malnutrition and poverty."

These lines constitute the gist of a message by which FAO's Director-General, Edouard Saouma, opened the May-June 1981 issue of FAO bulletin, "Ceres", on the occasion of the World Food Day. This issue of 38 large size pages contains several informative articles on the impending hunger in the eighties and how to confront it, the disadvantages of over-production, the third world food crisis and the consumer action in relation to it. An interesting article, written by Paul Harrison on the "Inequities that Curb Potential" tries to show the falsehood of the widely held opinion that it is impossible to eradicate human hunger. "The world already produces more than enough food to feed all its inhabitants adequately... The problem is not one of total production but fundamentally, one of distributions. Inequalities among countries have contributed to low incomes in developing countries and to low and uncertain returns to farmers for their cash crops.

Inequalities inside countries between urban and rural areas, between men and women, and between rich farmers on the one hand and small holders, tenants and landless on the other, tend to depress food production below its potential and are a major cause of poverty.

Inequality between men and women is one of the serious and underrated causes of malnutrition. Men almost always get priority access to food, both in quantity and in quality. Women suffer more from protein energy malnutrition and anemia than men. Malnutrition among them affects the quality and survival chances of the next generation, leads to low birth weight and often produces handicapped babies with low resistance to disease.

"Women are producers as well as consumers of food". They provide almost half of the resources in the villages of the Near East Region for agricultural and non-agricultural production.

In Africa, they are estimated to produce 70% of subsistence foods and elsewhere they specialize in tasks such as weeding or raising of small livestock. But women in most countries have no title to the land, even when they are acting heads of the households. Extension services, rural development programs, and research are usually designed by men for men. They tend to concentrate on men's crops and men's activities — mechanization, for example, has affected men's heavy duties such as water pumping or land preparation, but has left women's burdens as heavy as ever. Women's productivity lags behind men's, and with it, their share of the family's income. Production potential is wasted and mother and child nutrition suffers. Removal of all these discriminations against women would increase food production and reduce malnutrition considerably."

(1) Excerpts from Ceres May-June 1981, a publication of the Food and Agriculture organization of U.N.

Preview of the World Assembly on the Elderly⁽¹⁾

Full participation and integration of older adults into society would most likely be a major theme of the World Assembly on the Elderly to be observed in 1982, according to Ms. Margaret Kelly, Social Affairs Officer, U.N. Programme on the Aging, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs.

The Elderly considered to be over 60 years of age are the fastest growing segment of society. In 1970, there were 291 million people in the world over age 60. This figure will increase by 100%, by the year 2000, to 582 million older adults. The increase will be most pronounced in the developing world.

Some topics which will probably be taken up at the Conference are the problems of health, second and third careers for the aging, work and retirement, social welfare, etc.

There seems to be a trend towards flexible retirement in the developed countries, whereas the developing countries are increasingly favoring mandatory retirement at 65 or earlier.

The question of retirement is important, Ms. Kelly noted, because life expectancy is increasing everywhere, therefore, people should have the choice of working longer.

By the year 2000, even in African countries where life expectancy was lowest — Chad and Upper Volta under 40 years — it was anticipated that life expectancy would reach 60.

Some of the reasons for increased longevity are better medical facilities and the availability of other basic services contributing to longer life for a greater number of people.

The gap existing between women and men regarding life expectancy will equally increase in favor of women.

A number of innovative projects have been taken by some countries to avoid institutionalizing older adults. In Japan, which still has strong cultural traditions, as far

as its elderly are concerned, the government has subsidized younger adults to take care of the elderly.

An opinion survey in Japan was made whereby older and younger adults were asked whether they preferred to live with or away from each other. The majority in both age groups answered affirmatively to the proposal of cohabitation.

In the United States, where similar surveys were taken, different results were obtained. Both young and old preferred separate abodes, but were not adverse to living close by.

Another interesting pilot project was started by Australia: housing for the elderly called "granny flats" constructed on the younger person's property, the rent of which is very cheap due to government subsidy.

Britain had followed the example. Sweden, on the other hand, subsidizes monthly young adults who take care of disabled parents.

Australia also introduced a pilot project where they converted the first floor of two nursing homes into day care centers, and the elderly residents had contact with the children. Because of the success of that project, Australia now in the process of extending this pilot project to other nursing homes. The elderly were paid to take care of the children of working parents, which turned out to be a happy arrangement for both parties.

Ms. Kelly then reported that there were areas in the world where people allegedly lived to be well over 100 years old in Soviet Georgia, the Hunza area in Pakistan, and Peru. These areas had three common variables which might have contributed to the longevity of their inhabitants: all were in regions of high altitudes; the elderly worked manually and physically hard and they ate very little red meat.

(1) Excerpts from a summary on the topic, published by United Nations Office of Publication Information, Non-Governmental Organizations Section, 1 May 1979.

Country Papers on Career Services for Women in Asia Edited by Norah Shipstone, Asian Women's Institute, 1980

A book of 125 pages, edited by Mrs. Norah Shipstone, coordinator of the Asian Women's Institute, Lucknow, India, was received. It contains papers on problems of career counseling for women, prepared by representatives of the eight women's colleges and universities cooperating through the Asian Women's Institute and presented at the Career Counseling Conference held at Singapore in 1979.⁽¹⁾ The papers were based on primary and secondary information regarding career counseling services offered in each of

the following countries: Japan, Korea, India, Pakistan and Lebanon. They all reproduce valuable statistics in the fields of Women's education, training and employment.

In introducing the book, Mrs. Shipstone says that a critical appraisal of the facts and figures presented by the papers will show that "the gaps in the field of career opportunities and employment facilities is so wide as to motivate educators to restructure education and curricula for a future of options for all people. Such educational planning will make it possible for all to participate in the decision-making process which concerns their personal and social future."

(1) See "Al-Raida", May, 1980, vol. III, No. 12, p. 6.