

Asian Women's Role in Peace and Development⁽¹⁾

Under the auspices of the Asian Women's Institute (AWI)⁽²⁾, a conference, bringing together a number of Asian women and representatives of a few institutions of higher learning, was held in Manila, the Philippines, July 7-10, 1980. Its aim was to examine and affirm women's role in peace building and development. It was attended by about 45 participants, observers and resource persons from Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Lebanon and the U.S.A.

AWI chairperson, Mrs. Mira Phailbus, stated the purpose of the Conference and introduced the office bearers, AWI executive committee members, the guest speakers, resource persons, presidents and directors of consortium colleges and universities and other participants.

Mrs. Phailbus and other participants gave brief addresses emphasizing the message of AWI and its efforts for the implementation of peace and human values. Reports were given by representatives of women's studies centres. The discussions of the Presidents Consultation and Directors Workparty gave suggestions for possible projects to be implemented by consortium institutions and centres of women's studies in the triennium 1981-1984. The following paragraphs summarize their statements:

1. Peace and development need to be defined by colleges and universities in terms of their own local or regional needs.
2. Justice to women is essential to peace; women's issues must form part of education on university campuses.
3. The importance of relating curriculum to life experiences was emphasized.
4. Information about each other as people (countries, cultural and minority groups) and of issues confronting the world should be part of campus education.
5. The politicizing of students on campuses especially in times of regional conflict, e.g. in Lebanon, was considered a real problem. Administrators and faculty need to know what the students are thinking and guide them to maintain an atmosphere of learning on campus.
6. Dissemination of peace information through the media, children's literature, curricular and co-curricular programmes could be a special contribution of women's education.
7. More information about the changing roles of

women could be shared among faculty, students, parents and the community.

8. The importance of training and helping to develop competent professional women through the university was stressed by conveners.
9. Strengthening of natural and mathematical science education for women with a new approach to science curriculum and teaching was considered a real need and an important service which women's colleges and universities could render.
10. Continuing education and career education should continue to form part of the priorities.

The following pages contain abstracts of the three keynote addresses presented at the conference by women delegates from India, the Philippines and Thailand.

Preparing Women For Peace Building

In her conference address, Sr. Mary Braganza, president of the Sophia College, Bombay, India, emphasized the following points:

In education, it is not enough to stress academic excellence. To-day we have to see how education can promote the dignity of the human person and work to reform unjust structures.

Peace does not only mean absence of war but also absence of fear and development of a sense of inner freedom. Promoting peace requires the development of "co-responsibility as opposed to self-sufficiency, collaboration as opposed to competition, communion as opposed to isolation, concern as opposed to prejudice and indifference."

Experience has taught us that **competition** is one of the many destructive forces in the modern world. Competition is destructive for the students, frustrating for the teachers and does not do any good for the building of peace.

Steps that are necessary for administrators and those responsible for policy-making:

1. Using crisis as a door to creativity.
2. Creating the non-violent, non-manipulative form of leadership.
3. Identification with the group.
4. Encouraging students to accept themselves and their own gifts.
5. Prompt detection of any vocational preferences; it is not a matter of giving a scholarship to a girl economically poor but with no capacity for higher learning.
6. Cultivation of the dignity of manual labor.
7. Using effective, symbolic gestures, for example, in Scandinavia, women decided not to give their children guns or other weapons as toys.

⁽¹⁾ Condensed from *Asian Women*, vol. VI, n^o. XX, Sept. 1981, pp. 1-11.

⁽²⁾ About the Asian Women's Institute see Al-Raida, May 1, 1980, vol. III, n^o. 12, p. 10 and footnotes.

Handling the topic of women's development in peace from the Philippine perspective, Dr. Loretta Sicat, executive director, Philippine Social Science Council, gave certain ideas briefly stated as follows:

For men and women, equal opportunity for education and work is only partly true.

The labor laws, even when they tend to favor women in terms of benefits, leaves, etc., may act as inhibiting factors towards the hiring of women to higher positions.

It does not necessarily hold true in a general sense that the higher the level of one's education, the higher is the economic return, both for the country as well as for the individual. A woman with a Ph. D. might opt for domestic activity which restricts her productivity. She may prefer to stay at home because she does not want to rear a family of juvenile delinquents. She feels she can contribute more by giving all her efforts to the development of her family.

Now there are social institutions which help working women discharge their family responsibilities. The monetary value of a housewife's work is highly restricted, hence she should be given the opportunity of doing lucrative work outside the home. The sharing of the husband in housekeeping must be encouraged. Sex-role differentiation should not be the rule because a woman may be more fit than a man for certain activities monopolized by him.

Women who are more educated and more aware become more brave to object and to protest but their rebellion is generally interpreted in words and does not lead to violence and war; on the other hand, just as we need a women's liberation movement, we want men to be liberated from shackles which prevent them from understanding and sharing with women the benefits of peace and development.

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Dr. Prakai Nontawasee, of the Department of Humanities, Payap College, Thailand, pointed out in her address the danger of nuclear war.

By means of statistics, she showed the increasing economic responsibilities of women, which entitle them to exert a growing influence in their environment. In Bangladesh, for example, 90 per cent of the female population is engaged in agriculture. In Africa, women do 60-80 per cent of all agricultural work. In developing countries as a whole, they perform at least 50 per cent of food production.

Women's sharing in development is enhanced through education, especially at the higher level, which further stimulates their potentialities. But the pressing need is to give them the right sort of education, without which development will dehumanize people. **Education which is motivated by the desire for wealth and position, means a deep desire for manpower and militarism.**

The pursuit of peace and development is a life-long process. Education is a self-renewing task. It is also a process of communication and joint action with others.