

## UN Decade For Women 1975 - 1985

### A. Introduction:

When the United Nations was formed, women's organizations around the world successfully pushed for inclusion of a commitment to the equal rights of men and women in the UN Charter.

The 1945 Charter affirmed its «faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women».

In 1947, a **UN Commission of the Status of Women** was established as a subsidiary body to the UN Economic and Social Council. It was eventually instrumental in establishing **1975 as International Women's Year**. It also played a key role in developing the World Plan of Action and in securing the UN declaration of **1975 - 85 as the Decade for Women**. The Commission adopted as its guiding principle the intent to «... raise the status of women... to equality to men in all fields of human enterprise, and to eliminate all discrimination against women...».

The Commission's concern with discrimination has prompted three international conventions:

- **The Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952).**
- **The Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (1957).**
- **The Convention on the Consent to Marriage, Minimum age for Marriage and the Registration of Marriages (1962).**

Subsequently, the Commission drafted a single convention which was presented to and accepted

by the first World Conference on Women in 1975 at Mexico city. This became known as «**The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**» and was adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 16, 1979. What follows is a detailed chronology of the UN Decade for Women.

### B. Chronology:

#### 12 December 1974

The UN General Assembly Proclaims **1975 as International Women's Year**.

The objective of the year was to define the requirements for a society in which women participate in a real and full sense in economic, social and political life and devise strategies towards these goals.

#### 19 June - 2 July 1975

First World Conference on Women in Mexico City.

- More than 1,000 delegates from 133 countries adopt the World Plan of Action, representing a global consensus on what should be done to improve the situation of women.
- **The Draft Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women** is approved by delegates.
- Delegates also adopt a **Declaration of Mexico on the Equality of Women and their Contribution to Development and Peace**.
- A parallel conference, **The IWY Tribune**

(International Women's Year Tribune), takes place in Mexico City. Some 6,000 women from 100 countries participated in 36 expert panels and over 200 workshops. The meeting has been called «one of the largest consciousness - raising sessions ever held».

#### **December 1975**

The UN General Assembly adopts a World Plan of Action and a resolution establishing 1975 - 1985 as the UN Decade for Women.

**The International Institute for Research and Training for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) is established.**

The Dominican Republic is identified as the host country in 1979.

#### **1976**

**The Voluntary Fund for the UN Decade for Women (VFDW)** is established to provide technical and/or financial support for women's projects in developing countries. The Fund supports over 300 projects in 89 countries with special priority given to the least developed.

#### **January 1979**

The UN General Assembly endorses the following **subthemes for the Mid-Decade Conference: Employment, Health and Education.**

#### **July 14 - 31, 1980**

**The Mid-Decade Conference** of the UN Decade for Women opens in **Copenhagen, Denmark**. 145 States participate with 1,326 delegates.

- 57 countries sign the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and adopt a **Program of Action for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade for Women** to improve the status of women by the end of the Decade (94 «yes», 22 «no», and 22 abstentions).

- NGO's stage a parallel conference known as the **NGO Mid-Decade Forum**. It attracts more than, 8,000 participants from 128 countries who participate in over 2,000

workshops, panels, meetings and round-table discussions.

#### **December 1980**

UN General Assembly agrees to hold a 1985 World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the UN Decade for Women.

### **C. THE 1985 WORLD CONFERENCE**

**DATE:**

15 - 26 July, 1985

**LOCATION:**

Kenyatta Conference Centre, Nairobi, Kenya

**PARTICIPANTS:**

Attendance will be restricted to representatives of governments and UN bodies.

Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations with official status will also attend.

**AGENDA:**

- (1) Critical review and appraisal of progress achieved and obstacles encountered in attaining the goals of the UN Decade for Women at the national, regional and international levels.
- (2) Forward-looking strategies for the advancement of women up to the year 2000, at the national, regional and international levels, and for achieving equality, development and peace.

**DOCUMENTS:**

1. Review and appraisal of progress achieved and obstacles encountered at the national level based on information from governments.
2. World survey on the role of women in development in selected sectors of International Development Strategy.
3. Review and appraisal of progress achieved and obstacles encountered by the United Nations system.
4. A compilation of selected statistics and indicators on the status of women.

5. Forward-looking strategies for the advancement of women up to the year 2000.
6. Recommendations of the five regional preparatory meetings organized by UN regional commissions.
7. Situation of women and children living in the occupied Arab territories and other occupied territories.
8. Situation of women under apartheid.
9. Situation of refugee and displaced women.

**SECRETARY GENERAL:**

Ms. Leticia R. Shahani.

**D. The Nairobi NGO Forum**

Like the UN Conference, **Forum 85** will focus on «Equality, Development and Peace» and the sub-themes of «Employment, Health and Education», with special attention to the problem of rural women, the majority of whom live in developing countries.

**Date:**

8 - 17 July, 1985, Nairobi, Kenya.

**Purpose:**

To bring together women with varied backgrounds from the whole world to exchange information, learn from each other's experiences and plan for action to improve the situation of women after 1985.

**PARTICIPANTS:**

Everyone concerned with the status and condition of women may take part in the NGO Forum. Any topics related to the main themes and the subthemes may be presented.

**PROGRAM:**

Will include workshops, group meetings, working groups, panel discussions, daily briefings from the UN Conference, film shows and exhibits. It will be structured to permit the widest possible exchange of ideas and resources among participants.

**Importance of 1985 Nairobi Conference**

*«This Conference is the culminating international event of the United Nations Decade for Women. Its significance is enormous: dealing as it does with half the world's population, some two billion four hundred million beings who, be they destitute women farmers struggling for a living to support their families or women pioneering in the field of science, affect in a most fundamental way the rest of humanity.*

*Many problems remain unsolved, but undeniably the Decade has been instrumental in making governments and the public at large recognize the importance and magnitude of women's role in society. The coming Nairobi Conference will build on the experience of the Decade and adopt comprehensive and forward-looking strategies to ensure that women, in their multiple roles, can take their rightful place in society on an equal basis with men.*

*Women, as public figures, individuals, wives and mothers, have a stake in shaping the future. May this Conference serve as the catalyst which will usher in a dynamic, progressive and enlightened era in which women can contribute to and benefit from the sum total of humanity's aspirations and achievements».*

**Leticia R. Shahani**  
Secretary-General  
of the Conference

**NGO Suggestions for Forum 85**

*In a statement to the President of the Status of Women Commission, Kay Fraleigh, Chairperson of the NGO Committee on the Decade for Woman and International Alliance of Women Representative, reported the following (summarized) suggestions for Forum 1985.*

1. *The Forum should be oriented towards action and implementation.*
2. *The opinions of NGO bodies should be taken into account both when the Forum decisions are formulated and at every stage of the preparatory process.*
3. *Grassroots participation: Governments and NGO's should endeavour to include in their delegations to the UN World Conference and Forum 85 women working at local levels.*
4. *More training for women in science and technology is essential to ensure that they benefit from advances in these fields. Re-training is needed for women «displaced» by technology.*
5. *The problems of rural women should be heavily emphasised, especially with reference to the International Water Decade.*
6. *The value of the woman's role in the home (unpaid!) should be emphasised, and their full participation in the community encouraged.*
7. *The UN World Conference and Forum 85 need to be widely publicised to reach all sections of society.*

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