



Nairobi, a Catalyst for Change

Equality, development and peace were the main issues of the conferences held in **Baghdad, Nicosia and Nairobi**. The Baghdad conference (March 4-8) was sponsored by the General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW,) and focused mainly on peace.

The Nicosia conference (June 24-29), sponsored by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World was on the Integration of Women in Economic Development. Both conferences were in preparation for the Nairobi conference which marked the end of the decade for Women; and all three mark a firm step along the path of change and advancement.

The overwhelming message that has emerged from the women's decade conference (July 15-26) and the non-governmental Forum '85 (July 10-19) is that women have grown in stature since the UN announced the decade.

Residents of Nairobi and many observers from around the world were very skeptical about the conference. Part of this is well founded in the bureaucracy that involves most UN procedures and conferences. Part has been rooted in the fears of another performance of the 1980 mid-decade conference in Copenhagen, where crucial topics were overruled by dissensions over reaching a final blueprint on Zionism and apartheid.

The conference has been able to overcome these obstacles and ended in compromise over political issues

such as deleting a reference to Zionism as a form of racism; and to be replaced by a statement condemning "all forms of racism".

Today women's movement is more concerned with the basic economic and social welfare of women around the world, especially those struggling against poverty. There was a marked determination to reach a consensus on most of the important issues. Nairobi was an apt choice for the conference. Women in Africa are still regarded as possessions, they have only recently acquired the right to inherit. Kenya's Minister of Culture, Keneth Matiba, well known for his reputation as a chauvinist, opened the Forum by saying "We, the women of the world, will overcome".

Nairobi could prove to be a catalyst for change. The momentum of the meeting started at the Forum '85 and culminated in the conference. Women met and discussed the gaps in their lives, became more aware of their problems and at the same time more confident of their ability to solve these problems and achieve progress. The concrete result that emerged was mainly to ensure that the resolutions adopted for the protection of women were written into statute books around the world.

The late **Indira Ghandi** once said, "Change is inevitable. But it is up to us to control its content and direction".

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