

Nairobi: “if it’s not Appropriate for Women, it’s not Appropriate”[☆]

The UN-sponsored women’s decade conference (July 15-26) and the non-governmental Forum ‘85 (July 10-19) that was its prelude have attracted more than 10,000 women from 150 countries. The aim of the conference was to review the achievements of women since the UN announced the decade in Mexico in 1975 (Mid-decade convened in Copenhagen in 1980), and to set fresh goals up-to the year 2000. Delegates were expected to adopt a report setting out plans for women’s advancement. Equality, development and peace were the main themes of the conference.

There was no dispute on the basic need to consolidate the achievements of the women’s decade, and there was a consensus on most of the important issues. But the Committee in charge of preparations for the conference had lengthy arguments and did not agree on 58 of 372 paragraphs in a document setting out strategies for the future of women. The dispute items dealt mainly with the implication for women of South Africa’s racial policies, Israel’s occupation of Arab territories, the existing world economic and information order and the international peace movement. There were deep differences on how individual goals should be reached. US and Third World delegates divided on many issues. US delegates became increasingly intransigent as the conference drew to a close especially on the issue of the inclusion of anti-Israeli references into the resolution. A last minute compromise was reached, deleting a reference to Zionism as a form of racism. It prevented a walkout by the US delegation headed by President **Reagan’s** daughter, **Maureen**. All have agreed, however, that women must become more involved in the decision-making process related to peace.

Employment, health, education, food, water, agriculture, communications, housing and the environment were all covered, as well as refugees, the disabled, one-parent families, and social systems which tend to encourage evils such as prostitution. There was more focus on development in the workshops sponsored by Third World countries.

According to American feminist **Betty Friedan** “This

conference in Nairobi is possibly the last place on earth where we can do something that will make a difference in women’s lives... We must here at Nairobi, outline the future directions of feminism”.

Many workshops in Nairobi were about equity, equal opportunities and pay, and the general economic survival of women, especially the rural peasant women where progress towards equal rights has lagged. According to recent FAO statistics rural women work an average of 18-hours a day, and 30 per cent of all households are now headed by women due to labour migration to the cities.

Anne Neale, a member of the international wages for housework campaign said that women did two-thirds of the work in the world and received only five per cent of the global income, while they owned as little as one per cent of the world’s assets. She added that the issues of wages for housework should unite women, cutting across all boundaries. There was a consensus on the official recognition of the value to national economies of unremunerated housework.

There were spontaneous alliances between the Muslim Fundamentalists and the Holy See on the stand against abortion. The Iranians and lesbian groups spoke of the use of women “for the satanic pleasure of men”.

To conclude, we can summarize the specific demands which were approved unanimously and which will help women in the following areas:

- (i) Parental leave and day-care for children to reduce the “double burden” of working women.
- (ii) Increased participation of women in trade unions, political parties and the military, and greater involvement in technical and scientific fields.
- (iii) Immediate protection for abused women and children and the right to fight back their abusers.

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[☆] Slogan at the “Tech and Tools” exhibition at the Forum ‘85 in Nairobi.