

# The Women's Action Agenda 21<sup>(\*)</sup> of the World's Women Congress for a Healthy Planet Miami, November 8-12, 1991

In five intense days (November 8-12, 1991), The World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet rated an overwhelming success by participants, and realized that the nations of the world were rolling to Rio with barely a nod toward the participation of women.

The World's Women Congress for a Healthy Planet(1) which was held in Miami, Florida, produced a "Women's Action Agenda 21" for environmental action at Rio's Earth Summit. Earth-Summit secretary-general, Maurice Strong, attended the congress and vowed to endorse and promote it.

Here are excerpts of the Agenda emphasizing women's demands at the RIOSUMMIT:

## Women Militarism and the Environment

Knowing that military expenditures, the international arms trade, and armed conflict deprive billions of human beings of basic security and well-being.

Realizing the disastrous environmental impact of all military activity, including research, development and production of weaponry, testing, maneuvers, presence of military bases, disposal of toxic materials, transport, and resource use,

Aware that research on and use of military weaponry, including nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, contribute significantly to environmental degradation, genetic mutation, illness and deaths,

Recognizing that militarism often leads to the occupation of lands and the denial of human and environmental rights,

We call on UNCED to include in its Agenda 21 and final documents statements on the impact of militarism on the environment, development, and humanity and to support measures that

will transfer the world's vast military resources to positive, life-enforcing programs.

We urge an immediate 50% reduction in military spending, with the money saved reallocated to socially useful and environmentally friendly purposes.

We demand creation of gender-balanced national civilian commissions that would open to public scrutiny all military activities, expenditures, and research and development.

We demand that nuclear weapons be dismantled, that nuclear testing cease immediately, and a global nuclear test ban treaty be negotiated, signed, and enforced.

We demand the cessation of space activities and supersonic flights that release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and threaten the ozone layer.

We demand that more decisive action be taken to ban international traffic in nuclear, chemical, biological, and poison gas weapons or constituents of such weapons. Mechanisms should be developed for enforcement of this ban, whether

against governments, businesses, or individuals.

We support a UN commission report that recommended re-assigning military-related satellites and other information-gathering systems to monitor and share global environmental data.

We demand that armies be used as environmental protection corps to monitor and repair damage to natural systems, including clean-up of war zones, military bases and surrounding areas, and to be available to assist citizens in times of natural and man-made disasters.

We condemn governments that turn their armies against their citizens, causing millions of individuals to become refugees and displaced persons.

We will educate our daughters and sons to shun military service if it is in the service of governments that use military power to exploit the resources and people of other nations.

## Women, Poverty, Land Rights, Food Security and Credit

Recognizing that while their living conditions deteriorate, women in many regions bear major responsibility for domestic food production (Africa 80%; Asia 60%; Latin America, over 40%) as well as for protection of soils and other natural resources,

Noting that no one knows the realities of the over-exploitation of the land more intimately than the women who till it, draw its water, use its trees for fuel, harvest its forests for healing herbs and medicinal plants, and use their traditional knowledge for the benefit of the community, preserving species and ecosystems,

Recognizing that in many communities the nutrition of the family depends upon women's ability to produce family and market food products,

Aware that growing inequities in land tenure and ownership are the primary causes of women's poverty, emigration to urban slums, homelessness, environmental degradation, and the dispossession of indigenous people,

Recognizing that current agricultural policies in the industrialized and developing nations are uprooting and displacing land-based communities and diverting land from food production to cash crops for export,

We declare that because women and children are a majority of the one billion people in the world who go hungry every day, women's access to food, land inheritance, tenure, and ownership must be regarded as a basic human right.

We call on the UN, governments and non-governmental organizations to cease discriminatory practices that limit women's access to land and other resources, to increase allocation of resources that enhance food security,

and to provide appropriate technologies to reduce women's work.

We will strive to create awareness of the environmental impact of land-use technologies guided by immediate profit at the cost of long-term sustainability and productivity. Policies should encourage use of indigenous foods and invest more resources to develop local expertise in traditional production, storage and seed protection for future crops.

We urge women everywhere to join an international campaign to support

*Women founded the environmental movement, are its backbone everywhere in the world, suffer most directly from environmental devastation - yet have virtually no decision-making power in the councils and the corporations that rule the Globe. (Only 10 percent of the world's parliamentarians are women.) (2)*

women, men, and children depending on tropical forests, maintaining their communal rights to land and forest products. We recommend the World Rainforest Movement's statement on forests and forest peoples as a guide to action by UNCED at its meeting in Rio de Janeiro.

We call on multilateral and bilateral development funds and programs and NGOs to promote women's access to credit. They should increase their support for microenterprise lending through women-run financial

institutions as well as central banks in developing countries.

We demand that women be given greater access to water and fuel supplies and to food processing technologies (e.g., grinding mills; processing and packaging; oil extraction) and be assisted in setting up food cooperatives, community kitchens, women-owned seed companies, and farmers' markets. To protect trees from being used as fuel, alternative energy sources should be developed, such as inexpensive, durable, heat-storing solar or photovoltaic household cooking stoves, or at minimum, fuel-saving biomass (woodfuel, charcoal, or waste) stoves.

We reject as unacceptable the use of hormones, contaminants, additives, and irradiation in food production.

We call for special attention to the needs of women and children in urban centers experiencing phenomenal population growth. In refugee camps and hostile urban environments, the majority are denied land titles, low-cost decent permanent housing, use of basic amenities, such as water, sanitation, energy, and transportation, and access to building materials and credit.

We will campaign for the rights of urban populations not to be forcibly evicted from their homes and from

their rights to use urban land for subsistence production of crops and livestock as well as small-scale trade and production, without the harassment and with support from governments and international agencies.

We urge UN member states to adopt and implement the UN Conference on Settlements (Habitat) Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 200, by strengthening women's involvement in the human settlements delivery process. Central government planning

and implementation must involve local government and communities in these decisions, with non-governmental organizations functioning as a bridge between the official male-dominated policy-making mechanism and the practical approach of local communities and women's groups.

We call for the transformation of development strategies and development cooperation agencies. In every new or already established aid-giving mechanism or program, policy that specifies the involvement of women on an equal basis with men in determining the allocation of funds should be enforced.

We seek immediate enforcement of directives specifying that every funding proposal be examined for the participation of women, including grass-root women, in design and management, and for its impact on the economic, social, health and educational status of women as well as community-level and indigenous people.

We demand that, to compensate for 46 years of underfunding the needs of women and their families, half of the international development resources should be reaching women through broad-scale projects such as access to drinking water, upgrading technologies, and researching ways to reduce women's workloads.

### Women's Rights, Population Policies and Health

Knowing that the major causes of environmental degradation are industrial and military pollutants, toxic wastes, and economic systems that exploit and misuse nature and people, we are outraged by suggestions that women's fertility rates (euphemistically called population pressures) are to blame,

Recognizing that this analysis, if unchallenged, lays the ground-work

for the re-emergence of top-down, demographically-driven population policies and programs that are deeply disrespectful of the basic human rights of women as guaranteed in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Knowing that it is the number of people plus their consumption of resources plus their wastes that

*Esteemed heads of states, the Agenda 21 and the various treaties that are adopted and signed are a gesture of goodwill, commitment, and recognition of the fact that the Earth's resources belong to all and should be equitably shared by all, as far as possible. Agenda 21 sets the stage for the policies to be ratified and enacted by governments and funded by the international community.*

determine their environmental impact, we note that a person in the industrialized world has a far greater negative impact on the environment than a person living in a poor country,

Aware that the right to reproductive health and choice is a basic human right for all individuals, we point out that the World Fertility Report

estimates that there are 500 million couples who wish to plan their family size but have no access to the means to do so,

Fearful of the threat to women's lives by the HIV pandemic and recognizing that women's ability to protect themselves from AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and to determine when-and-if to have children is a prerequisite for women's health, self-determination, and empowerment,

We condemn any attempt to deprive women of reproductive freedom or the knowledge to exercise that freedom.

We demand women-centered, women-managed comprehensive reproductive health care and family planning, including the right to prenatal care, safe and legal voluntary contraceptives and abortion, sex education, and information.

We urge governments, multilateral and donor agencies to increase investments in comprehensive reproductive health services and to include men as beneficiaries of family planning education and services. Family support services should include child care and prenatal leave.

We call on policy-makers to recognize that raising the economic, health, education, and social status of women are essential to ending environmental degradation.

We call for recognition of the existence of a global, environmentally induced cancer epidemic and demand removal from the environment carcinogenic substances, which have particularly adverse effects on women and children. Particular

attention in medical research and treatment should be paid to women's cancer: breast, ovarian, cervical, uterine, and vaginal. Research and remedial action should also focus on the effects on health of toxic chemicals, nuclear wastes, radiation, pesticides and fertilizers.

We demand that all governments systematically alert their citizens to the danger of AIDS and provide them with the information on how to avoid contamination.

We ask the World Health Organization, International Labour Organization, The Food and Agriculture Organization, national governments, public health groups, corporations and unions to increase efforts to eliminate environmental occupational hazards in factories, offices, and on the land.

## Women's Consumer Power

Recognizing that women are powerful catalysts, as individuals and in groups, in creating a healthier planet for ourselves, our families, our communities, and nations,

Believing that our spending choices should express concern for environmental protection,

Aware that the power of the consumer is decisive in industrial planning and production,

Believing that women can use their consumer power to enforce

environmentally and socially friendly industrial development,

Noting that many products bought by women in industrialized nations are based on low wages and hazardous working conditions of women in poor countries and communities,

We pledge to act in solidarity with women around the world to change policies responsible for economic, social, and political inequities and restore our planet to health.

We will form and strengthen existing networks among women globally to facilitate the analysis of consumer goods, from the extraction of raw materials through production processes to use and disposal - to measure holistically the environmental, socio-economic, and health impacts of a product.

We will engage in campaigns supporting investment in environmentally sound protective activities and encourage initiatives to reduce fossil fuel energy use, overconsumption, and wastes.

We pledge to use women's enormous consumer power to boycott businesses and institutions that are not

eco-conscious and to support and commend those that are.

We pledge to reduce paper consumption and to promote recycling - not just recycled use products but developing reusable products.

We will organize campaigns against siting sewage treatment plants and incinerators in poor urban communities and seek non-polluting solid waste management planning and restrictions on mercury emission restrictions.

We will seek to reduce the use of cars and encourage the use of public transport systems, redesigning them to reduce energy consumption, and focus on safety and accessibility to those who experience difficulty in using mass transportation.

We will choose natural products, avoiding those based on animal testing or toxic chemicals, and seek safer food products.

We advocate development of retaining programs and creation of new socially useful job opportunities for those displaced by the transition of more eco-friendly societies.

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"The Women's Action Agenda 21" also includes demands and claims related to the implementation of **Democratic Rights, Diversity and Solidarity; Code of Environmental Ethics and Accountability; Foreign Debt and Trade; Biodiversity and Biotechnology; Nuclear Power and Alternative Energy; Science and Technologies Transfer; Information and Education;** Furthermore, the Agenda offers recommendations to the United Nations asking for a gender-balanced participation in all agencies, policy-making and actions to protect and preserve our environment and our

planet.

The environmental issue is a global concern, the solutions need to be implemented on the global level. The women of the world exist in both situations. Thus, this Women's Agenda Action 21 is proof of women's abilities and capabilities to make a difference in saving the planet. •

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Footnotes:

(\*) Reproduced in part from the Official Report of the World's Women Congress for a Healthy Planet which took place in Miami Florida on November 8-12,

1992.

(1) The Women's World Congress for a Healthy Planet was held in Miami on November 8-12, 1992. It brought together 1500 women from 83 countries determined to put a women's agenda at the centre of the United Nations' Earth Summit.

(2) quoted from Michele Landsberg's Overview in the official report of the World's Women Congress for a Healthy Planet.