

Rio News Briefs

How Women Made it to Rio

The first UN PrepCom (UN Earth Summit preparatory committee), in August 1990, did not include women in the draft. Delegates from several countries as well as a number of women's organizations initiated action on the missing gender perspective. The mobilization ranged from UNCED Conference in Geneva (1) to two gatherings organized by The Women, Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) in Miami Florida. The proceedings and conclusions of these meetings were also forwarded to the UNCED Secretariat, and parts were incorporated into the official document.

Hence, by PrepCom 4, held in New York in March 1992, The Women's Caucus was present and well prepared. Daily briefings were held in the UN Secretariat as women took on the task of monitoring the meetings.

Consequently, the language adopted in the Agenda will serve as a basis for policy planning and implementation at international, regional and national levels. It reflects a consciousness of how the issues affect women and how women, in turn, can affect issues.

taken from "Women are on the map and in the Agenda by Anita Anand in *Earth Summit Times*, the official newspaper of record for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Tuesday June 9, 1992. pp.2.

(1) See *Al-Raida*, #56, pg. 14.

Women at the Summit

Of the 178 official delegations present in Rio de Janeiro for the Earth Summit, only 10 were headed by women. But hundreds of women delegates were cooperating with their heads of delegations in the negotiation of compromise for a healthier planet. Their prominent presence was noticeable from the very first day of activities of the Summit in Riocentro. The women delegates said their participation in the Summit was real -- but not enough. The only occasion which grouped them together in the UNCED general agenda was the "woman Caucus" held earlier.

Nevertheless, the largest and most central of all structures in Flamingo Park, where the Global Forum was held was the **Women's Tent, Planeta Fermea**. Thousands of participants and visitors went in and out, visiting the largest platform, to be informed and stimulated with on-going debates and panels. Planeta Fermea witnessed, sponsored, discussed, and raised issues such as population issues, freedom of choice, reproductive health, sustainable development, water, sanitation, involvement in policy making, energy, forestation, fresh water, and other gender-related environmental and global issues.

taken in part from "Women at the Summit: We're here, but too few" by Lyon-Hou Ramirez, *Terraviva*, The independent daily of the Earth Summit, Friday June 12, 1992, p. 10

Survival of the fittest is bad ecology politics

"How many people are too many people for the planet?" was the question asked in the packet tent of the Planeta Fermea, by Vandana Shiva from India, in response to Jacques Cousteau's statement that the population explosion is the biggest environmental enemy.

Shiva said that an isolated discussion of demographic growth of the Third World "is a false question". She said the variable of unequal consumption of resources in different regions and the unbalanced population distribution should not be excluded from the question.

The French oceanographer Cousteau made his comments about population in the presence of Brazilian President Fernando Collor de Mello and Rio-92 Earth Summit officials.

Smiling and serious, Shiva denounced the "Philosophy of selection" in population politics.

"Selection is a military tactic for times of war, when the weak and wounded were abandoned to allow the strong to survive," explained Shiva.

Jornal Do Brasil/English Edition, June 7, 1992, pg.7

Women will not be Coerced/ Policies Violate "right to fertility"

AS the Chorus to halt population growth in order to save the planet rose around them, women's groups put women's reproductive rights at the center of the population debate in the Earth Summit.

At a forum on population and the environment, on the weekend of June 6-7, June 1992, speakers said population policies violate women's "rights to their fertility" and how they choose to exercise this right. They said this is being done by institutions or structures that coerce women not to reproduce on the one hand and not to be sterilized, not to have abortions and not to use contraceptives on the other hand.

The women who raised the issue include presidents of women's groups in Latin America and the US. Population policies, they felt, must follow the basic principle that "no human being can be used as a means to someone else's ends." This means population policies that inform, educate and make it possible for women to make good choices and trust that they will act ethically in relation to their communities. •

Excerpts from "Women will not be Coerced, Policies violate 'right to Fertility'", by Eulalee Thompson and Bert Wilkinson. in *Terraviva*, The independent daily of the Earth Summit, Monday June 8, 1992. No. 5. pg.8.

Women At the Global Forum and in participating NGOs

Wangari Maathai, was chosen as the sole NGO representative at the Rio-92 Earth Summit. Maathai was elected unanimously by NGOs as the best expression of the path that the ecological movement will take after Rio-92.

Maathai is the founder of the Green Belt organization, a women's organization whose objectives include seeking solutions to desertification of Africa's water problems. She is also a member of the Executive Committee of the National Women's Council of Kenya. On the eve of the last preparatory meeting to the Earth Summit, last March, she was arrested and detained while participating with others in a strike to obtain the freedom of children, political prisoners and the tortured. She was freed in time to send a message on behalf of the Third World to the official delegations participating in the preparatory meeting.

At Rio she said that the unequal relations between the North and the South are reproduced in Third World countries and neither of the two inequalities can be corrected in isolation.

