

**INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN
ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE DES FEMMES**

**Equal Rights - Equal Responsibilities
Droits Égaux - Responsabilités Égales**

**AMENDMENT TO
IAW NEWSLETTER - June 2000**



Equal Rights

Dear IAW members,

Please forgive the temporary editor – by mistake I included a short unedited section in the June Newsletter under WOMEN LAW & POLITICS. Please delete the section after the first paragraph of that article and insert the following much longer section in its place:

Pat Giles took us through the four previous Women's World Conferences In Mexico City, the Tribune which at subsequent World Conferences became the Forum, was situated a long way from the United Nations Conference and had its own programme, based on the themes "Equality, Development and Peace". Although wide ranging, it gave us no indication of the document on which the UN meeting was working until we were addressed by a Elizabeth Reid, a member of the Australian government delegation.

She described to us the inadequacies of the Plan of Action which was of course, very much a document of the 70's, at which time feminism was rare among member states' delegations. Indeed, many countries had been resistant to the idea of a UN Women's Year or a World Conference on Women.

The world's press was quite hostile and we were seeing headlines such as " Mum's the Word as Big Yak Yak Begins".

We at the Tribune were very concerned to hear from Elizabeth that the Plan of Action made no mention of women's human rights to health, education, etc. but took an instrumental view : for example women needed to be healthy in order to bear healthy children; they should be educated in order to work more productively. There was no reference to violence against women which reflected the fact that even Western member states had as yet given it no recognition.

The women at the Tribune, disappointed and fired up, split up into working groups, (as a trade unionist I worked on the employment section); drafted policy which reflected what we saw as appropriate; somehow found typewriters, paper, and carbon paper in this strange, enormous city and produced our own Plan of Action.

Much anger accompanied our subsequent realisation that this, of course, had nowhere to go, the preliminary work on the official Plan of Action having been completed in New York over the previous months, and the document being in its final stages.

Helvi Siipila, the Secretary General to the UN Conference, addressed the 6,000 seething Tribune women, portrayed on this occasion by the media as a rabid mob! Explaining the UN process she assured us that our energy and passion would not be wasted if we took our new knowledge of the UN and the status of world's women home with us and set about educating our organisations and our governments at all levels - in short, anyone who would listen. We would thus be much better prepared to influence our states for the next World Women's Conference.

In Copenhagen, women took a big step forward. CEDAW had been finalised in 1979, coming into force in 1981 – [ratified now in June 2000 by 166 states, Saudi Arabia being the most recent]. More emphasis on women's human rights was called for: female genital mutilation (FGM) was widely discussed for the first time and a rapporteur was subsequently established by the UN Commission on Human Rights to investigate Traditional Practices which are Harmful to Women and Children, which include FGM and son preference.

In Nairobi in 1985, women's human rights were definitely on the agenda and the Forward Looking Strategies to the Year 2000 was a long and comprehensive document which included many issues not previously included, among them a reference to women's need to control their own fertility.

In 1993, the Vienna Summit on Human Rights produced a Declaration on the Rights of Women, using the slogan "Human Rights are Women's Rights", and the UN General Assembly that year adopted a Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

UNICEF subsequently ran a campaign entitled "It is Not a Crime to be Born A Woman" with an image featuring a woman of the Sub Continent holding twins, a healthy bouncing boy and an emaciated girl. This is an issue still in need of much attention.

The 1993 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development has been among the most critical achievements for women's liberation, establishing groundbreaking language on reproductive rights.

By 1995 there was much more emphasis on all forms of discrimination and violence and the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women produced the Programme for Action with its twelve "critical areas" based on the articles of CEDAW.

This 1995 text has been the subject of systematic analysis at the intervening annual Commissions on the Status of Women, and strenuous efforts have been made here in New York, June 2000, to strengthen and expand the document.

On this occasion, with access to most of the UN working sessions, women of non government organisations have had much more direct influence than ever before; it has been a long road but we have come a long way in the 25 years since Mexico!

As always, much effort is expended on achieving consensus, which usually means that some crucial issues are lost, but most agree that there is a great sense of achievement in bringing all the members states (apparently there were 180 present) to agreement on an improved and more comprehensive document.

Now we must take it home and see to its implementation.