

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

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

IAW NEWSLETTER - September 2000



Equal Rights

Dear IAW members,

Vice-president Rosy Weiss is sending an urgent request and if it concerns you, please answer her soon! Trafficking in Women will be the fourth theme of the IAW Board meeting in Tel Aviv. With Women in Politics, Violence against Women and "Where do Women's Rights stand at the beginning of the new Millennium", the IAW seminar will be a very interesting one. Also in this newsletter an article about fighting illiteracy in India by MS Rakesh Dhawn, the elections in Japan, CEDAW in Australia, a boost in Pakistan, a new law to punish abortion in Guanajuato, Mexico and a network of world water women ...

UNCTAD

Rosy Weiss is urgently directing your attention to the Least Developed Countries (LDC) meeting in February 2001. Looking at the list of the 48 least-developed countries Rosy sees so many of our member organisations that should be interested in getting involved in the preparatory process of a new Programme of Action for the LDCs, that she would like to take the lead in getting them together and, eventually, being represented at the women's meeting and sending someone to Brussels to the actual LDC III.

Rosy would like to know the names of IAW members who attended the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee in New York in 1999. Please be so kind to mail her as soon as possible the names and addresses to: Rosy Weiss, Veithgasse 9/6, A-1030 Vienna AUSTRIA, e-mail rosa-anna.weiss@vienna.at Please send Rosy Weiss your reactions as soon as possible. Also have a look at www.unctad.org

Trafficking will be the fourth issue of the Seminar in Tel Aviv.

At the Special Session of June 2000 your editor was so lucky to get one of the 50 tickets to attend the UN Assembly. It was a privilege sitting there in the gallery of that wonderful hall, the one that we are seeing on television during the Millennium Summit. At the Session in June NGO members sat there watching as speakers were escorted to the lectern and their names and states were announced by the President and listening to all the good things which had been achieved for women in all those countries. Listening to some 'longwinded' speeches was sometimes a bit boring but there were also some remarkably concise speeches. Let's go to the State of Denmark:

Mr. President,

Let me highlight an area where progress is most important.

Trafficking is one of the most degrading violations of women's human rights. A root cause of trafficking is almost always poverty. Women are looking for better lives – not least for their families. In a recent trial in a Danish court a witness, a young Latin-America woman, was asked why she had ended as a prostitute in Denmark. She answered: "You have no idea of the level of poverty my family and I were facing".

Long-term development is needed to fight trafficking. But other tools must also be utilised.

International so-operation is essential to identify those behind crimes. Traders must be punished and victims must be protected. Human rights instruments are imperative in the fight

for women's rights. Negotiations on a UN protocol on trafficking are taking place in Vienna. Let us make them a success!

The IAW was a founder member of the first UN working group on slavery and trafficking. Today we are attending each year the UN working group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. The IAW is also a member of the NGO Caucus in Geneva against trafficking in persons. And IAW members are working very hard on the respective issues in Vienna. The base of our work is the outcome of an IAW seminar on Trafficking in Women, organised by former IAW President Alice Marangopoulos, October 21-22, 1996. And again, trafficking will be on the agenda of the seminar of the Board Meeting in Tel Aviv, October 31 2000.

Here is a quote from IAW President Patricia Giles in her report of a three day meeting on trafficking in March in Manila, to which twenty governments from the Asian region and the same number of non-government organisations sent representatives:

From the information available it appears that no continent and few countries are free of traffickers, and as many as two million women and girls as young as nine are being sold into slavery annually. They are being shipped from most Asian countries, North, Central and South America; the Caribbean, Africa and increasingly from Southern Europe. The value of the trade, frequently associated with the running of arms and narcotics is variously estimated as between seven and ten billion dollars (US) a year.

Sanctions?

Let's go to IAW Vice-President Jessica Kehl, but please also visit the UN website <http://untreaty.un.org/English/guide/>. It gives an overview of key terms used in the UN Treaty Collection. After reading all this, maybe you will ask yourself, as I did: "What about sanctions?" With this kind of vague and overlapping instruments of international law every country can turn away from every serious accusation. This was the answer of Jessica Kehl:

Sanctions will only hold when there is a possibility to go before Court. That's why we feminists are supporting a new International Criminal Court as proposed in Rome 1997. Sanctions against a state will only be taken by other states if all states are sure that it is most necessary and - useful in their own interest (for example, all states wanted to make a sanction on Apartheid in the Republic of South Africa, RSA).

In the meantime the IAW is constantly urging all national member organisations to be aware of the reports given by their governments to the different treaty bodies. They should tell the women in their country what their government said before the Committee of the Treaty, for example the splendid things their government said it did for women. They can also give the Committee a shadow report with the women's point of view. Visibility, IAW members! Informative websites are:

<http://www.igc.org/icc/index.html> <http://www.un.org/law> <http://www.icj-cij.org/>

Let's repeat the statement of Denmark at the special session:

Human rights instruments are imperative in the fight for women's rights. Negotiations on a UN protocol on trafficking are taking place in Vienna. Let us make them a success!

Another key theme of the Board meeting is

- Women in Politics and Decision Making Positions

In September and October 1999 an online working group collected nearly 1000 messages from 37 countries from the North and the South, of key themes like: what is the status of women's political representation; how are women in political office or other decision-making positions addressing gender issues; what has been the impact of affirmative action programmes on quotas? The participants in the dialogue reported quite different national experiences, regarding representation of women and the legislature. The list of obstacles to progress is sad to read, but the lessons learned

are illustrated by cases from all over the world. They are most inspiring.

- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Japan

One of the actions to promote women in power and decision-making is to bring greater visibility to women's and gender issues as well as to women's representation in decision-making. A great institution to highlight that visibility is the IPU, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, an international organisation that connects parliaments in over 100 countries, with headquarters in Geneva. IPU is active in international efforts in increasing women's representation in parliaments. In Japan the 50% increase of women's representation in the Lower House at the July elections was mainly due, according an IPU survey, to two factors: 1) most of the political parties added more female candidates and 2) **women's groups outside political parties carried out vigorous campaigns through internet and other networks.** Well done! Still, with 7.3% women in parliament Japan continues to rank the lowest among the G-8 countries. See <http://www.ipu.org/>

Boost for Pakistan's women

- Commission to tackle violence against women

Human rights activists in Pakistan have welcomed the creation of a National Commission to protect women's rights and help raise their status. At the Commission's inauguration on Friday, the Minister for Women's Development, Attiya Inayatullah, said the Commission would look at violence against women as one of its first tasks. This has been pinpointed by many as a priority because, as one activist said, you cannot talk about development while women do not feel safe in their own homes. Human rights groups also hope illiteracy will be among the first issues to be tackled.

- Election hopes

The Minister said the commission would set its own agenda, with education and reproductive health care being important priorities. She said no-one had the right to stop women voting, as happened in some areas. Pakistan's military leader, General Pervez Musharraf, has been praised for fulfilling his promise to set up the commission. He has also announced that a third of the seats in the upcoming local elections will be reserved for women. A founding member of the Women's Action Forum said the Commission had been one of their long-standing demands and that they wanted a wide variety of issues, such as literacy, violence, health and poverty to be addressed. However, critics say the main need is for implementation of recommendations and they warn that unless the Commission has the power to force through new legislation, it could become yet another toothless watchdog.

By Susannah Price in Islamabad, BBC News, 2 September 2000

CEDAW in Australia (from Priscilla Todd and Pat Giles)

The Australian Federal Government - without any consultation with anybody - has announced that it will not sign the Optional Protocol to CEDAW and has tied this to a refusal to accept the findings of UN Committees, saying they need to be changed. This has arisen because there has been UN criticism of a) the treatment of Aborigines and b) the mandatory sentencing laws in some States whereas our Prime Minister says these matters are internal matters. However, that is quite separate from the refusal to sign the Optional Protocol which is seen in many quarters as a direct attempt to undermine the influence of women's NGOs because of their lobbying tactics and criticism of the government.

The Australian government's obtuse attitude to the Committees generally seems to be founded on the impression that committee members are required to judge complaints from citizens against complaints which could be laid against other member states. Of course, when ratifying Conventions, member states make commitments to adhere to those Conventions, and it is when they fail to keep those commitments that they breach their undertakings - regardless of the behaviour of other states.

As reported today (Sept 8) the Australian Prime Minister's speech to the Millennium Conference was mainly about the recent horrible events in East Timor; it does not mention the Protocol to CEDAW; skates lightly over the need to reform the committee system, and concentrates on the need for a more inclusive Security Council. We think he may have listened to good advice since arriving in New York!

Lisa-Jane Solomon, Convenor, Women's Electoral Lobby in Victoria, and WEL members in other States, have been busy with media interviews, press releases, etc. Lisa-Jane put the following words together and asks that Australian members copy this and make it part of a petition to government:

The Federal Government of Australia is wholeheartedly condemned for its decision not to sign the optional protocol for the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. We strongly urge the Government to reconsider their decision.

Furthermore, we demand that the decision of the Federal Government to withdraw from participation in Committees of the United Nations which act to encourage member States to value and uphold the rights of all their citizens be rescinded.

Decisions of this nature should only be considered as a result of thorough consultation with those Australian citizens and their representative non government organisations likely to be affected by such action.

Quality of water

The date was June 7th 2000, late at night just before the pause. Workshop 2 of the special session Beijing +5 was discussing paragraph 106 b.

106 b. Readapt environmental and agricultural policies and mechanisms to incorporate a gender perspective so that all governments in co-operation with civil society begin monitoring and informing women on water quality, and support women farmers with education and training in sustainable food production, particularly organic.

In the galleries Maria Arias, convenor of the Environment Caucus NGO/CSW, who had worked for three months to get this paragraph drafted by consensus of the caucus into the concept document, was watching intensely at what would happen.

There was a bit of discussion among delegates. The paragraph contained two messages, one about the quality of water and one about organic food, and the language about organic food was opposed.

Maybe the delegates were a bit tired and longing for some relaxing moments and not thinking too clearly. Things like that can happen in politics at all levels. Anyhow, the result was that the most important part of 106 b about the quality of water was also deleted! Paragraph 106 b became:

106 b. Adapt environmental and agricultural policies and mechanisms, when necessary, to incorporate a gender perspective, and in co-operation with civil society, support farmers, particularly women farmers and those living in rural areas, with education and training programmes.

- World Water Women

Don't feel sad, Maria Arias! At the end of June 35 women of water management organisations and information institutes met in Paris for three days to discuss the quality of water. They set up the "Gender and Water Alliance", an informal network of local, regional and national institutes, NGOs, individuals etc. from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe. An e-mail address for co-ordination was put up and the news about this network of 'World Water Women' was announced on www.iiav.nl and see www.vrouwenbelangen.nl Any IAW member who is interested can e-mail francis@irc.nl More news about the quality of water in next editions of IWNews.

Eradication of Illiteracy Amongst Women

Mrs. Rakesh Dhawn, All India Women's Conference

The Indian constitution has provided equality, liberty and freedom to all and it also recommends

removal of practices derogatory to the dignity of women. The role of women in the development of world culture has become a global issue. The present decade is the decade of "Education for all" and the "simultaneous goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education" was to be achieved before 2000 A.D. Charles Fonnier, a great French idealist, once said that "one could judge the degree of civilization of a country by the social and political position of its women". Eradication of illiteracy amongst women has immense significance as it has a vast role in determining social, economic and political status. Education of girls is essential on the grounds of social justice and it also accelerates the process of social transformation.

A World Bank report released on the eve of Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing) said that India is among the few countries in the world with fewer women than men, higher female mortality particularly during childhood and a general preference for 'sons' leading to lower social and economic status for women. The report further added that poorer the family, the more it depended on the earnings of women. The Indian society invests for less in its women than its men. Over 60% of the Indian female population above 7 years of age is illiterate compared with about 35% among males. Even though women constitutes one third of the total labour force and half of the agricultural labour force, their productivity is severely constrained because of this "under-investment". The World Bank report further added that nations like India are "losing much in terms of productivity by not investing enough in women".

The UNDP Human Development Report 2000 released on June 29th, mentions that India fails in its endeavour to provide universal primary education despite half-a-century of elected Governments. It further quotes the findings of a survey that 30% of all children aged 6 to 14 years – about 59 million boys and girls, are out of school. The survey showed that 12% of primary schools had only one teacher, 58% of schools had two rooms, 60% had a leaking roof and only 25% of teachers were found teaching while the remaining were either absent or engaged in other activities. The Indian Constitution, it points out, has failed to make mandatory primary education a right for all citizens. The report also says that resources are not a critical restraint since countries with similar constraints, such as China, have legal guarantees for this right. Social norms and traditional attitudes continue to impede women's access to education in India.

In 1993 the AIWC drew up programme for the eradication of the five most basic evils:-

- a) The propagation of Violence and Vulgarity in the media, TV, Cable Networks
- b) Alcoholism and Drug Abuse.
- c) Training and Development of Panchayat Raj Administrators
- d) Promotion of employment of women living in rural and tribal areas.
- e) Eradication of Illiteracy by the year 2000 and Education for all.

Lots of ideas have been floated for the eradication of illiteracy. The cognitive change, that is primarily aimed at creating awareness or knowledge about illiteracy has been easy to achieve. But the "action change" has been harder to achieve. Here the various action groups involved in 'illiteracy eradication' have to comprehend and take specific actions. Even if a target group (eg illiterate women and the girl child) has a favourable attitude towards the action, to carry out the action itself may be impeded by such factors as distance, time, expense or plain inertia. Aggressive marketing is necessary to highlight the benefits to the citizens (or target groups) which such a programme will provide. Here marketing of 'ideas' in the social sense will be directed towards:

- identifying first the needs of the "target group" and then serving those needs
- carefully worked out and formulated programmes to achieve the desired response from the 'target group'.

Sadly the statistics show an increase in numbers of uneducated females and a disparity ratio of 1.4 in 1997 between male and female literacy.

The National policy on Education (1986) and its programme of action (1992) have emphasised the need to determine the barriers to girls' education and to subsequently eradicate those barriers. Equalising educational opportunities with special reference to women's education is urgently needed and an understanding of gender based barriers in education is a prerequisite to this end. A thorough examination of:-

The AIWC urges a thorough examination of

- 1) The School System
- 2) Family Environment
- 3) Societal Influences
- 4) Government Plans and Policies relating to Women's Education.

Certain problem areas which need deeper probing and need the attention of policy makers include :

- 1) Sex role-typing in jobs (women make better teachers, nurses)
- 2) Causes behind non-enrolment of girls in schools, giving with special attention to societal, geographical and cultural differences.
- 3) Socialisation patterns that are derogatory to women
- 4) Devise and implement innovative and effective programmes for the upliftment of women
- 5) The Removal of gender bias in text-books i.e. father goes to work and mother cooks food.
- 6) Programmes to attract girls living below the poverty line to attend school.
- 7) Ways and means of raising the economic status of women.
- 8) Removal of inter-cast, inter-religion and inter-areas disparities

To achieve these aims requires monumental efforts both on the part of Government and NGOS. There is a need to address the problem of interaction between the Government and NGOs in order to develop a mechanism to clarify the roles leading to the development of concrete actions for the overall development of women and girl child.

New Law to Punish Abortion in Guanajuato, Mexico

Women's groups in Mexico launched a national campaign against the criminalisation of abortion, after president-elect Vicente Fox's party passed a new law to punish the practice in the state of Guanajuato. Fox, who served as Guanajuato governor from 1995 to 1999, is known to be anti-abortion. 'What can we expect after December 1 when Fox takes the reigns of the government? Will abortion be penalised?' ask feminist organisations in pamphlets distributed all over Mexico.

Legislators of the conservative National Action Party (PAN) in Guanajuato, Fox's party, approved a penal code reform last week that calls for punishing any woman who voluntarily interrupts her pregnancy, even if she has been raped or suffers health problems.

- Women who undergo abortions face eight-year prison sentences -

that is according to the new law, which is to take effect October 1 and passed without prior public debate. Dozens of feminist groups launched demonstrations to demand the annulment of the abortion law in Guanajuato and to warn against the possibility that such a measure could be implemented at the national level. The 32 Mexican states permit abortions, but only in special cases, such as rape or if the mother's health is at risk, and then only with a declaration from legal authorities. If an abortion is performed otherwise, it is a crime. An estimated 300,000 illegal abortions take place every year in Mexico, and an average of 1,500 women die from botched procedures, according to the Ministry of Health. Other sources, however, say the numbers are twice or three times that high. For the past 30 years, women's groups have presented a range of requests, claims and demands to decriminalise abortion.

- New law: abortion for any reason is illegal.

The law reform passed in Guanajuato eliminates all exceptions, establishing that abortion for any

reason is illegal. Male Archbishop Sergio Obeso stressed that the Roman Catholic Church considers abortion to be murder. Yes, a woman has the right to make decisions affecting her body. But no, in the case of pregnancy, she does not have the same right because it is a question involving another human being, Obeso took the time to explain. Feminist activist Duarte claims that women must be able to decide for themselves if they want to have children, because it is the woman's life and future that are at stake!

Health experts estimate that doctors, nurses and midwives make over 500 million dollars a year from clandestine abortions in Mexico. And official studies indicate that follow-up treatment for women who are suffering problems related to poorly performed abortions represents a yearly expense of nearly 20 million dollars. Pro-choice organisations believe that if abortion were not a crime, as it currently is in most cases, the deaths of thousands of women could be prevented.

Today, abortion is the fourth leading cause of death among Mexican women. But ask the pro-lifers if they care! Ask Archbishop Obeso who has never been pregnant. Ask Vicente Fox, who never will be.

Mind the Amazon hoax!

Dear IAW members, your editor got fooled by a 'hoax'! The message in the July newsletter about the Amazon Forest was not true. Internet and e-mail are wonderful instruments, but one should take care of the trustworthiness of the authors of messages. With our apologies!

From the EC

Note: to avoid misunderstanding, we always send the IAW Newsletter twice, 1) in the body of the e-mail, and 2) as an attachment, saved in Word 6.0/95. Both have exactly the same content. The only difference is, that the attachment has a better lay-out, so it will be easy for Affiliates to copy it and send it by post to IAW members without e-mail.

Please note too that the e-mail address of IAW Secretary Priscilla Todd has changed into toddsec@golocal.com.au

NB: We invite you to redistribute this Newsletter to IAW members without an e-mail address. Also, please advise us if you know of any IAW members or affiliate/associate organisations with an e-mail address, and in that case: please be so kind to contact Pat Richardson.

International Alliance of Women / Alliance Internationale des Femmes

IAW Secretary: Priscilla Todd, toddsec@golocal.com.au (*[Note new email address]*)

9th Floor, 10 Queen Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000, Australia

Membership Officer: Pat Richardson, patgum@nvi.net.au

P.O. Box 380, Nambucca, Heads, NSW 2448, Australia

IAW Newsletter, provisional e-mail address: Joke Sebus, joke.sebus@inter.nl.net
