

Rights of Women

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Joint Statement to the fiftieth session of the Commission on Human Rights
Agenda items: 11a) Rights of Women 19) Advisory Services

Statement signed by the following non-governmental organizations: International Council on Social Welfare, International Alliance of Women, International Council of Women, Zonta International, Mouvement Internationale ATD Quart Monde, World Federation of UN Associations, Association of Countrywomen of the World, International Commission of Jurists, International Abolitionist Federation, International Council of Jewish Women, All India Women's Conference, International Women's Tribune Centre, Amnesty International, Baha'i International Community, International Movement for Fraternal Union of Races and Peoples, National Council of German Women's Organizations, International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism, Centre Europe - Tiers Monde, Asian Women Human Rights Council, Namibia Women Action for Equality Party, Peoples Forum for Human Rights, Centro de Estudios para la Mujer (Costa Rica), International Lesbian and Gay Association, Peoples Decade of Human Rights Education, International Federation of Social Workers, International Association of Penal Law, International Association Against Torture, WAGGGS, WYWCA, World Federation of Methodist Women, Socialist International Women, World Jewish Congress, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Federation of University Women, World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations, Inter-African Committee, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, CHANGE, Mothers for Peace Croatia

Geneva, Switzerland

February 1994

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In addition to my own organization, the International Council on Social Welfare (TCSW), I speak today for 39 other NGOs, which have joined together in this statement because this issue is of such importance. The list of these organizations which represent a broad spectrum of NGOs is attached to this statement. Together we represent many millions of people throughout the world.

Beyond those whom we directly represent, I am confident that we speak on behalf of girls and women of all ages across the globe who would like to see "the UN...give priority to enabling women to enjoy fully their human rights" as stated in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

They look to this body, which represents the very core of all human rights activities in the UN system, for action. Mr. Chairperson,

It often happens that an extraordinary meeting convened to take a fresh look at matters which are under regular observation, galvanizes efforts and musters the

political will to take an extraordinary leap forward. Such has been the case with the World Conference on Human Rights. Despite its fractious beginnings here in Geneva, the WCHR went on to achieve landmark resolutions which can guide us into the 21st century.

Among these is Part II B, section 3 "The equal status and human rights of women" of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action which calls for the integration of the human rights of women into the mainstream of UN system-wide activities. Other milestones include Resolution 93/46 adopted by last year's Commission, as well as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. These represent the steel fittings on which we must build. We also believe that the task of integrating women into human rights activities after 45 years of indifference by this Commission will require the unrelenting commitment and attention on the part of member states, the UN system and the Centre for Human Rights as well as NGOs.

In order to achieve this task, we propose that the following action be taken by this body to begin to redress the gender imbalance which has persisted for so long:

* On the premise that the appointment of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women for an initial three-year period will be made at this session we urge that her work begin immediately and that her mandate include the following:

* study the causes and consequences of violence as stated in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Article 1, and Part II, Paragraph 38 of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action;

* seek and receive information from governments, intergovernmental organizations and NGOs including women's groups;

* respond effectively to such information;

* recommend measures for prevention and action against violence, and its causes and consequences;

* coordinate her activities with those of other special rapporteurs of the Commission as well as with other UN bodies and agencies. In particular, we urge that her mandate takes due account of the work of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) as well as the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

To perform these tasks satisfactorily, she must be given the necessary resources and staff for her work.

* Furthermore, we believe it is essential that last year's Resolution 93/46 must become operative. As you will recall, this Resolution directs all Human Rights mechanisms, the other Special Rapporteurs, Working Groups and Treaty Bodies which report to the Commission, to include gender perspectives in their reports.

In this respect, we are pleased to note that the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, His Excellency Dr. P. H. Kooijmans, specifically pointed out that: "No one should use the new Rapporteur as an excuse to stop looking into the problems women face regarding their rights."

* Further, in considering its rationalization of work, we ask that the Commission considers making the rights of women a separate item on the agenda until the day when women's rights are fully integrated.

* We also welcome the appointment of a Focal Point on Women at the Centre for Human Rights. In order to ensure that she will be able to respond to the enormous requirements of this task, we believe it essential that she be given the necessary authority and resources. As NGOs committed to human rights and the advancement of women, we pledge our support for all aspects of her important work, especially the mainstreaming women's rights in the Center for Human Rights as well as system-wide coordination.

* We would like to comment under item 19 (Advisory Services). We believe it is essential that awareness of the human rights of women must form an integral part of the advisory services program. The Centre should incorporate an equality component in the programme and ensure equal participation of women and men in training courses in human rights, especially in the administration of justice, and give scholarships to women and men on an equal basis. Regional and national arrangements should include provisions to train women. If the gender perspective it is not included at the country level, the momentum for mainstreaming the human rights of women will be lost.

* Finally, we urge that at each juncture where "geographical balance" is taken into consideration, by the same token, "gender balance" should be included. For example, as geographical balance was included automatically in the selection of the Bureau for the 50th session, would it not have marked a real response to the recommendations of the WCHR to have achieved gender balance in the Bureau as well.

Mr. Chairman, the world's people, their imagination and hopes aroused by the worldwide coverage of the Vienna Conference, wait for a strong signal from the Commission on the Human Rights that the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, especially of women's rights, will be undertaken with speed and commitment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

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