

Women Farmers and Food Security

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The Baha'i- International Community, convenor of "Advocates for African Food Security: Lessening the Burden for Women" [see explanatory note at the end of the statement], a coalition of non-governmental organizations, is pleased to address the 33rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women regarding the influential role of women in guaranteeing African food security. The Advocates was formed following a UNIFEM initiated symposium on African woman farmers concurrent with the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1986 on the Critical Economic Situation in Africa. The Advocates' aim is to coordinate action to maintain a global focus on the role of women in activities necessary for countries to achieve full food security. Membership in the Advocates has expanded from the fourteen founder organizations to over thirty. The Advocates work on practical ways to lessen the burden of women in the areas of food, health, water and energy, in order to free their potential to produce crops, not only for their families, but for national food security.

At the Commission's 32nd session, the Advocates urged the Commission to take all possible steps to ensure that women's concerns would be taken into full account at the mid term review of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990, and that the needs of African farm women be given the highest priority in the recommendations addressing the issue of food security in African recovery and development.

It is with pleasure that we note in the Final Statement of the Mid-Term Review a promising increase in awareness of the crucial contribution made by women to the establishment of food security. Para 47 states "The traditional role of women as producers of a significant proportion of food should be protected and strengthened when new agricultural production methods are introduced. More attention must be given to ensure that women have access to agricultural extension services, credit, land titles and, not least, new technologies." Para 52 refers to the role and contribution of women in the developing process as of crucial importance, and to the necessity for African countries to "allocate substantial resources to make it possible for women to participate more fully as active economic agents in development programmes, especially in rural areas."

It is of some encouragement to the Advocates that the efforts of concerned United Nations bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, National Governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), for example, those participating in the Advocates project, are having impact on the thought and actions of governments and peoples. There are hopeful indications that development policies may be becoming more responsive to the needs of women farmers.

The Baha'i- International Community, therefore, on behalf of the Advocates, appeals to the Commission on the Status of Women to support activities that

will ensure that the present momentum continues toward bettering the lives of farm women, and thereby enhancing their contribution to food security.

In particular, we urge the Commission members to:

Ensure that women and NGOs are full participants in all aspects of the Conference on Popular Participation, which the United Nations, as an outcome of the Mid-Term Review, decided to hold in Africa in 1990. Assurance is needed that opportunity will be given for NGOs and individuals to make recommendations of people and organizations to receive invitations to attend.

Seek support and assistance of United Nations bodies and national governments in strengthening the role of the African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET) in coordinating the flow of information among various African women's organizations concerned with women's development.

Provide opportunities to better prepare African women leaders of NGOs for more effective participation in development planning meetings in the area of food security.

Support the strategy developed by participants from 11 African countries at the All African Women NGO Leaders Workshop sponsored by UNIFEM and the International Federation of Business and Professional Women in Accra, Ghana, in January, 1989.

Notes

The following organizations are founding members of the "Advocates": African-American Institute; Baha'i- International Community; Church Women United; CODEL, Inc.; Committee of NGOs on the UN Decade for Women; Institute of Cultural Affairs; International Women's Tribune Center; Lutheran World Federation; Lutheran world Relief, Inc.; National Council of Women of the US; Oxfam-America; Save the Children Foundation; Trickle Up Program; World Council of Churches (CCIA). Serving the Advocates in an advisory capacity are staff of the Non-Governmental Liaison Service of the United Nations (NGLS); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW); and the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

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