

## ASSIGNMENTS FOR ACTION: Next Steps For Americans

Americans and the organizations to which they belong can play an important role in seeing that the **Plan of Action** adopted at Mexico City is effectively carried out. The suggestions which follow are readily adaptable for action at the national, state and local levels. Governments can make the difference; **be sure to communicate your views to your elected representatives.**

- Support priority allocation of funds for women's development programs in US bilateral and multilateral foreign aid appropriations. Monitor implementation of the Percy Amendment to the US Foreign Assistance Act which requires "particular attention" to be paid to "programs, projects and activities which tend to integrate women into national economies."
- Urge US ratification of UN treaties on the status of women (see box).
- Support the Equal Rights Amendment if your state has not yet ratified it.
- Encourage women to run for elective office.
- Encourage appointment of qualified women of high office in the US, the UN and as delegates to major international conferences.
- Promote legislation to implement the provisions of the IWY Action Plan, e.g., liberalized maternity benefits, adequate child-care facilities, access to health and family planning services.
- Work to eliminate property and divorce laws which discriminate against women. Support legal services by and for women.
- Contact the media and insist on standards of programming and advertising which will create a positive image of women. Watch for the unconscious put-down of women.
- Call the attention of the news media to significant instances of discrimination against women by employers, credit institutions, government practices and officials.
- Monitor the media (and other employers) for signs of tokenism in hiring women (i.e., are all female TV news reporters young and pretty? Is there a woman producer or director?)
- Review school curricula and teaching materials to encourage elimination of sex stereotyping (i.e., little boy a doctor, little girl a nurse).
- Work on eliminating discrimination in education systems where there are few women in policy-making and administrative positions.

### Within Your Organization:

- Support affirmative action programs and the US National Women's Agenda (for information write to the Women's Action Alliance, 370 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017). Join with UNA-USA Chapters and Divisions and other organizations in *ad hoc* coalitions for action on one or more of the recommendations in the Plan.
- Adopt a work program on women's issues. This goes for all voluntary associations—women's, men's, educational, religious, labor, etc. Focus on those sections of the Action Plan which are most relevant to your organization's interests.
- Join with your organization's international affiliates in selecting women for scholarship and job training exchange programs.
- Get directly involved in women's projects in the developing countries. Join with other groups to raise funds for UNESCO Gift Coupons. For information, write to UNESCO, United Nation, New York, 10017. Many groups are also active in raising funds for UNICEF. For specific information on UNICEF's work for women, write to US Committee for UNICEF, 331 East 38th Street, New York, N.Y. 10016.

#### UN CONVENTION ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS\* NOT YET RATIFIED BY THE US

Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952)

Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (1957)

Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (1962)

ILO Convention on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation (1958)

ILO Convention on Equal Remuneration (1951)

Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1951)

UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1962)

Convention on Recovery Abroad of Maintenance (1957)

\*For description of these Conventions, see Selected Bibliography, *Human Rights*.

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS: Some Points for Discussion

- Statistics show that birth rates are highest where the standards of living are lowest. Should development assistance be made conditional on including comprehensive family planning programs?
- Many women contribute to their countries' economies without pay, particularly homemakers and farm women. How does this affect development in the Third World? In the industrialized countries, should this be recognized through tax credits, special subsidies or other monetary devices?
- Women comprise more than one third of the world's labor force; but in general their positions and salaries are not equal to that of men and they are limited to traditional women's jobs. What is the best way to overcome these inequities? For example, in the industrialized countries, would "quota" hiring be desirable or is it a form of reverse discrimination?
- Can women effect any real changes in their status without becoming part of the political power structure at both the local and national levels? If active participation in the governmental process is essential, to what extent is a militant or "radical" position necessary to achieve even moderate progress?
- Should governments set standards for the portrayals of women in the media? Would this constitute censorship and an infringement on the rights of freedom of speech and the press?
- How will improvement in the status of women on a worldwide basis help men? How can the changing of traditional roles minimize psychological and social inequities and dislocations in the family and community structure?



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## A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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*Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Women Workers*, 1975, ILO Report, ILO, 1750 New York Avenue, Washington, D.C. 20006, \$6.95.

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*Many Sisters: Women in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, 1974, Carol J. Matthiasson, editor, The Free Press, 866 Third Ave., New York 10003, \$15.00.

*Integration of Women in Development*, 1975, Ester Boserup, Christina Liljencrantz, UNDP, United Nations, New York 10017.

*Mothers Too Soon*, 1975, Population Crisis Committee, 1835 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

*The Story of Mexico*, 1975, Center for Economic and Social Information, United Nations, New York 10017.

*The Status of Women and Family Planning*, 1975, United Nations, New York 10017.

*Turning Point for Women*, August-September, 1975, *UNESCO Courier*, UNIPUB, Box 433, Murray Hill Station, New York 10016, 90¢ ea.

*Women and the UN*, 1975, *UNITAR News*, UNITAR, 801 UN Plaza, New York 10017, \$1.00.

*Women of the World*, Jennifer S. Whitaker, *Foreign Affairs*, October 1975.

*Women and Work in Developing Societies*, 1974, Nadia Youssef, Population Monograph Series, #15, Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720.

*Women in World Terms: Facts and Trends*, Center for Integrative Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton, New York 13901.

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROGRAMS

*Community Survey on the Status of Women*, The Population Institute, 110 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002.

*Model IWY Conference*, UNA-USA.

## FILMS

Listings available from UNA-USA.

Single copy—25¢      100/\$6.00      1000/\$50

## ONLY THE BEGINNING: A Blueprint for Equality

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Institute for World Order, Inc.

League of Women Voters of the United States

National Association of Colored Women's Clubs

National Conference of Christians and Jews

NCCJ—Women's Task Force

National Council of Negro Women, Inc.

National Council of Women of the United States, Inc.

National Education Association of the United States

National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, Inc.

Population Crisis Committee

Population Institute

Soroptimist International of the Americas, Inc.

United Church Board for World Ministries

United Methodist Office for the United Nations

United Presbyterian Women, The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

Women United for United Nations

YWCA of the U.S.A., National Board

Zonta International

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Information on U.S. programs for women:

**National Commission on the Observance of  
International Women's Year**

Room 1004  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

ONLY THE  
BEGINNING:  
A Blueprint  
for Equality

The International  
Women's Year  
Conference

Mexico City, 1975

## THE MEXICO CITY CONFERENCE: What Happened

*International Women's Year, 1975, is over. But the work toward equal partnership of women and men has only just begun. This was made clear at the IWY Conference.*

"I am confident that this Conference will represent a turning point in changing attitudes, prejudices and assumptions which are based neither in human equity nor practical common sense."

—UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim  
at the opening of the IWY Conference

The first worldwide gathering of governments ever held to deal with women's issues was convened in Mexico City from June 19 to July 2, 1975, under UN auspices. The Secretary-General of the Conference was Helvi Sipilä of Finland, the highest ranking woman in the Secretariat. The Conference was attended by over 1,000 delegates from 133 countries, almost 75% of them women. An additional 6,000 people from 80 countries came to the unofficial Tribune held simultaneously with the Conference, while a record 1,500 journalists reported on both.

Both the Conference and the Tribune provided the first opportunity on this scale for Western women to exchange views and experiences with their counterparts in the developing countries. This consciousness-raising exercise proved essential to the ultimate outcome of the Conference. There was a serious attempt behind the scenes to identify the common problems shared by all women regardless of real differences in national, economic, political and cultural objectives. Although the press highlighted conflict situations, projecting an image of division and futility, most observers agreed it was a much greater success than had been expected, but it was only the beginning.

### Some important steps toward equality had been taken. The Conference had decided on:

- A *Decade for Women and Development* to last until 1985
- A *World Plan of Action* for those ten years
- A *Declaration of Mexico*, including some of the principles on which these actions are to be based
- Specific actions to be taken within the UN system to put some of these decisions into effect

## THE MEXICO CITY CONFERENCE: Why It Was Held

"There is a common base of feeling that women, whatever their situation in countries around the world, have been getting the short end of the stick."

—Ambassador Barbara White  
Alternate US delegate to the  
IWY Conference

### Inequality is World-Wide

#### In Education

- A majority of the world's 700 million illiterates are women, in some areas over 80% of all adult women.
- Males outnumber females in school enrollment, especially in the developing countries. In the US, latest statistics show 44% women versus 56% men enrolled in high schools and colleges.

#### In Employment

- Although women account for more than one third of the world's labor force, in most countries they are concentrated in unskilled and low-paid jobs.
- Jobs are still thought of in terms of "men's" or "women's" work, with the latter traditionally the lower-paying. In the industrialized countries, women's pay still averages only 60%-70% of men's.

#### In Public Affairs

- Few women hold policy-making positions at the national level. The percentage of women in national legislatures is usually less than 10%, in the US Congress only 3.4%.
- In 1974 only 8% of the delegates to the 29th UN General Assembly were women and 38% of the delegations had no women at all.

#### In Law

- Marriage and divorce laws frequently deprive women of equal personal and property rights. In some countries a woman must have her husband's consent to work or to travel.
- Women have more difficulty obtaining financial credit and are generally at a disadvantage under social security systems. In the US, only 10% of the men but 30% of the women receive *minimum* old-age pensions.

#### In the Family

- Child care and household tasks are still regarded as primarily the woman's responsibilities even if she also works long hours outside the home.



## THE WORLD PLAN OF ACTION: Some Highlights

This was the essence of the Conference. Together with the Conference resolutions which strengthen and further define it, the Plan provides the framework in which governments and individuals can achieve the primary goal: full equality for men and women. None of the recommendations attempt to set rigid goals to be applied to all countries. Rather, each country is left free to determine its own priorities and timetables. The Plan recognizes that full implementation "will require a redefinition of certain priorities and a change in the pattern of government expenditure" and emphasizes a series of objectives in specific areas.

#### Education:

- Establishment of national target dates for eradicating illiteracy among women and girls from 16 to 25.
- Free and compulsory primary schooling and equal access to education at all higher levels.
- Identical curricula for girls and boys with teaching materials designed to change discriminatory attitudes.
- Life-long access to education, formal and informal, including pre-school and adult programs.
- Increased coeducational technical and vocational training, with improved career guidance for women.

#### Employment:

- Programs to eliminate all job discrimination on the grounds of sex or marital status.
- Guaranteed equal pay for equal work.
- Elimination of sex-typed job descriptions and hiring practices.
- Maternity leaves with job security for at least one year.
- Increased child-care facilities.
- More women executives in the private sector.
- Establishment of minimum wages for domestic work and cottage industries.
- Improved access to financial credit, especially among low-income groups.



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## WOMEN'S PLACE IN THE THIRD WORLD: Different and More Unequal

*The concerns of women differ with their economic status, their education and their countries' traditions. With 70% of the world's women living in the developing world, much of the Conference was devoted to the problems among the most seriously disadvantaged. Among its recommendations were:*

- Inclusion of women on all policy-making bodies, especially those dealing with population policies and development planning.
- Improved facilities for both formal and functional education of women and girls, particularly in rural areas.
- Development of improved rural technology and training of women in its use.
- Improved access to health and nutrition education and other social services.
- Inclusion of family planning, maternity and child health services in all public health programs.
- Assistance in creating rural marketing cooperatives and in providing instruction in basic commercial skills.



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#### Public Affairs:

- Unqualified equality in civil and political rights by 1978.
- Establishment of national commissions or other high-level official mechanisms to promote the achievement of women's rights.
- An increase in the number of women in public office at all levels.
- More opportunities for women to enter the foreign service, participate in foreign policy decision-making, and serve as delegates to international conferences.

#### The Family:

- A reassessment of the traditional roles of men and women within the family unit and an equalization of their rights and responsibilities.
- Easy access to family planning information and services.
- Establishment of family counselling services including legal advice for women.
- Equality of personal and property rights in cases of divorce.

#### The Media:

- Elimination of stereotyped images of women.
- Efforts in programming and advertising to raise the public consciousness about the changing role of women and their positive contributions to society.
- Appointment of women to high administrative and professional posts, e.g., editors, producers, columnists.

## THE DECLARATION OF MEXICO: Every Woman is a Person

*The Declaration adapts, amends and further defines the concept of equality. Although the US delegation supported most of its principles, because of political statements included in The Declaration, the US voted against it. Among the Declaration's 30 principles are:*

- Equality in "dignity and worth as a human being."
- Opportunities for "developing one's intellectual potential to the maximum."
- Government responsibility to "create the necessary facilities so that women may be integrated into society while their children receive adequate care."
- "Equality in the family and in society" so that "work and home possibilities may be effectively combined."
- The responsibility of the media to remove the cultural and attitudinal factors inhibiting equality for women.
- "Every couple and every individual has the right to decide freely and responsibly whether or not to have children as well as to determine their number and spacing and to have information, education and means to do so."

## DECADE FOR WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT: Next Steps for the UN

- A reevaluation of all existing programs and policies by all agencies in the UN system.
- "Impact statements" forecasting the effect on women of all future international development plans.
- Allocation of additional financial resources and staff—particularly women staff—to women's projects. Priority is to be given to literacy programs and development projects.
- A review of current International Labor Organization (ILO) job classifications and addition of a new classification, the normally unpaid work of homemakers, farm women and volunteers.
- Translation of the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women into a legally binding international convention.
- Improvement of research techniques and development of more accurate statistical indicators of the status of women on which to base future programs.
- Establishment of an International Research and Training Institute for the Promotion of Women, to be financed by voluntary contributions.
- Achievement of a balance between men and women employed at all levels of the UN Secretariat and the specialized agencies.
- Convening of a second women's conference in 1980, the mid-point in the Decade and the Plan of Action.

## THE UN AT WORK FOR WOMEN

1946: The *UN Commission on the Status of Women* is established to promote women's rights in the political, economic, social, civil and educational fields. Its work results in a series of declarations and international conventions.

1967: The General Assembly adopts the *Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* designed to "ensure the universal recognition in law and in fact of the principles of equality of men and women."

1972: The UN designates 1975 as *International Women's Year* to intensify efforts to achieve equality and full participation of women in their respective societies.

1974: At the suggestion of the US, the Economic and Social Council calls for the convening of the *IWY Conference*.

*The World Population Conference* recommends measures for improving the status of women as essential to effective population planning.