

[Oct. 1977]

National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year



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BACKGROUND ON THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE AND THE IWY COMMISSION

The largest convocation of women in this country -- and certainly the first such meeting ever to be funded by the U.S. government -- is scheduled for November 18-21, 1977, in Houston, Texas.

As a prelude to this historic event, 56 diverse and dramatic women's meetings, one in each State and Territory, were held: American women from Maine to Alaska, Hawaii to Guam, voted on resolutions and delegates to send to the National Women's Conference in Houston. These meetings also draw up State Plans of Action to improve the status of women, through action at the State level.

First time conference-goers, women who had never stayed in hotels before, migrant workers, coal miners' widows, handicapped workers, even prison inmates, women from a wide sweep of ages, incomes, ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds boarded buses, snow plows (Vermont's meeting in February drew over 1000 participants), and car pools to get to their State Meetings.

Each State followed similar guidelines, provided by the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, but each meeting reflected the special ethnic and racial flavor of the State. Rhode Island translated their materials into Portuguese as well as Spanish, and Maine provided French language translation for their French-Canadian Community.

Alaska's meeting attracted 780 people who elected a 12-member delegation including Tlingit, Eskimo, Athabaskan, Black, Japanese, and Caucasian women. Attendance topped 4500 in Minnesota; 6000 in California; 11,000 in New York; 13,000 in Utah. At least 130,000 have participated across the country.

Resolutions came from a wide range of workshops on the issues that most affect women: Homemaker Rights, Child Care, Employment, Education, Teenage Pregnancy, International Interdependence, Media, the Equal Rights Amendment, Credit, Physical and Mental Health, Female Offenders, Older Women, Women in Elective and Appointive Office, Racial and Ethnic Women, the Arts and Humanities, and Strategies for Change.

Public Law 94-167 named the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year (IWY) as sponsor for the State Meetings and the National Conference. Each state shares in the \$5 million funding provided by Congress for the meeting series.

Recommendations and a final report on the Conference will be submitted to the President and Congress in March, 1978.

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MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL IWY COMMISSION:

BELLA S. ABZUG, Presiding Officer

RUTH ABRAM	BERNICE S. FRIEDER	ERSA POSTON
MAYA ANGELOU	MARTHA GRIFFITHS	CLAIRE RANDALL
ELIZABETH ATHANASAKOS	DOROTHY HAENER	ALICE S. ROSSI
BETTY BLANTON	RHEA MOJICA HAMMER	GLORIA SCOTT
CECILIA PRECIADO BURGIAGA	LADONNA HARRIS	ELEANOR SMEAL
LIZ CARPENTER	LENORE HERSHEY	JEAN STAPLETON
JOHN MACK CARTER	KORYNE HORBAL	GLORIA STEINEM
SEY CHASSLER	MILDRED JEFFREY	ETHEL TAYLOR
RUTH C. CLUSEN	JEFFALYN JOHNSON	CARMEN DELGADO VOTAW
AUDREY ROWE COLOM	CORETTA SCOTT KING	GERRIDEE WHEELER
JANE CULBRETH	MARY ANNE KRUPSAK	ADDIE WYATT
HARRY T. EDWARDS	MARGARET MEALEY	SENATOR BIRCH BAYH
BEVERLY EVERETT	JEAN O'LEARY	SENATOR CHARLES PERCY
MARCH K. FONG EU	MILDRED PERSINGER	REP. ELIZABETH HOLTZMAN
BETTY FORD	CONNIE PLUNKETT	REP. MARGARET HECKLER

GOALS OF THE STATE MEETINGS AND THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE:

- to recognize the contributions of women to the development of our country;
- to assess the progress that has been made in promoting equality between women and men in all aspects of life in the United States;
- to study the role of women in economic, social, cultural and political development;
- to assess the participation of women in efforts aimed at the development of friendly relations and cooperation among nations and to strengthen world peace;
- to identify barriers that prevent women from participating fully and equally in all aspects of national life, and to develop recommendations for means by which such barriers can be removed;
- to establish timetables for the achievement of the objectives set forth in such recommendations;
- to provide a forum for all women to join in the celebration of their past efforts and to make plans for the future.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The United Nations proclaimed 1975 International Women's Year and sponsored a conference that year in Mexico City. Conferees adopted a World Plan of Action to improve the lives of women worldwide.

In the United States, a Presidential Order established a National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year. The Commission's task was to adopt recommendations aimed at eliminating barriers to equality for women. That Commission made 115 recommendations in its 1976 report, "...To Form A More Perfect Union..." *Justice for American Women*. This report serves as a handbook for the State Women's Meetings and for the National Conference to come.

International Women's Year was extended to a Decade for Women (1976-1985) by the United Nations. A Second World Conference has been scheduled for 1980. As part of the U.S. participation in the Decade for Women, the 94th Congress extended the life of the National Commission to March 1978 and provided funding for State Meetings and the National Women's Conference.