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UNITED
NATIONS

OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS SECTION

OPI/NGO/SB/51

5 November 1974

NGOs AND INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR 1975

(Not an official record or press release. This is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free re-dissemination).

The following is a summary of a background briefing given by Mrs. Sally Swing Shelley, Chief of the Education Information Programmes Unit of the Office of Public Information, on 2 October 1974 for representatives of non-governmental organizations at United Nations Headquarters.

First, I have good news: International Women's Year will be financed appropriately by several generous contributions from Member States.

Second, the major International Women's Year Conference on a governmental level will be held in Bogotá, Colombia from 23 June to 4 July 1975. ^{1/}

Third, there are many events planned for the eve of the year and scheduled for 1975 which already show that interest in International Women's Year is not only widespread but International Women's Year promises to be an occasion generating an unprecedented level of activity and enthusiasm.

Among these events are the following:

Françoise Giroud, Secretary of State for the Status of Women in France, will be visiting New York and will be honoured at a luncheon given by the Secretary-General on 25 October. ^{2/} Her visit will be the occasion of a major exhibit at New York University on "Women in France". The events surrounding this exhibit will include a roundtable on women in the media with the participation of Daisy de Galard, Editor-in-Chief of Elle; Lenore Hershey, Editor of Ladies' Home Journal; Pat Carbine, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of Ms; and Charlotte Curtis, Editor of the OP-ED page of the New York Times. Mme Giroud herself will speak at Vanderbilt Hall on 22 October.

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On Tuesday, 22 October, the United Nations Association of the United States has planned a ceremony at Rockefeller Plaza, New York, at which Mrs. Helvi Sipila, Secretary-General of International Women's Year, will deliver a keynote address.

The International Labour Organisation will include on the agenda of its International Conference on Labour an item on equal opportunities and equal pay for working women.

NGOs and UNESCO are organizing an International Conference on International Women's Year in March 1975.

A meeting will be organized under the auspices of the Sub-Commission on the Status of Women (the Sub-Commission of the Special Committee of International NGOs on Human Rights - Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status), Geneva section, which will be chaired by the Women's International Democratic Federation, whose representatives come from all over the world. This meeting will take place in Geneva at the beginning of July 1975.

These are only a few of the many events already being planned for International Women's Year. Mrs. Sipila's office will issue an international calendar of events shortly so as to keep you up to date. You, yourselves, should inform Ms. Una Ellis of the Branch for the Promotion of Equality of Men and Women of your own meetings and programmes involving International Women's Year so that the Branch may know of your plans.

We meet at a significant time for our fragile planet: 1974 is World Population Year and next year is International Women's Year, which is dedicated to equality between the sexes and the enhancement of women's role in peace and development.

To many of you, International Women's Year may seem redundant. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we could well ask:

1. How far have we come?
2. How far do we have to go?
3. What are the international implications of women's equality to the world's population problem?
4. What does this mean to NGOs?

How far have we come?

New Jersey granted suffrage to women in its new constitution adopted 2 July 1776. It provided that "All the inhabitants of this colony of full age who are worth 50 pounds proclamation money with clear estate of same... shall be entitled to vote at the general election." In 1790, when New Jersey was already a state, this was interpreted to mean both men and women. But on 16 November 1807, the General Assembly passed laws providing that only free white male citizens could exercise the right of franchise. This comes under the general heading of "Tried it once, didn't like it."

Just over 100 years later, New Zealand, in 1893, became the first nation in the world to grant women suffrage.

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When the founding fathers of the United Nations drew up the Organization's Charter at San Francisco in 1945, they established in the very first paragraph of the Preamble their fundamental objective: to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. In the very next paragraph of the Preamble they reaffirmed their faith in the fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women.

The Commission on the Status of Women started working in 1946 making an invaluable contribution to women's rights, particularly in the areas of political equality, equality before the law, the right to education and improving economic opportunities for women.

Then, in 1948 the General Assembly unanimously adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since then many new nations have patterned their constitutions on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today, 120 nations grant women the right to vote and participate in the political rights of their countries. Only 4 nations and 1 territory still deny this right. Compare this to the third of the nations which in 1945 still denied women the franchise.

None the less, when my mother - an ardent suffragette - died not long ago, she was disappointed that, despite all these efforts, the basic inequities remain.

A brilliant analysis by Ms. Anne B. Iglitzin, Assistant Director of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Washington, gives the reason: the persistence of patriarchal thinking.

In an article in the Center Magazine, she points out that the term "patriarchy" has ancient roots going back as far as the Old Testament. In its most precise sense, patriarchy is a system built around the supremacy of the father, the inferiority of women, and a rigidly regulated hierarchy of power. In the fully developed patriarchal household, the rule of the eldest father extended beyond his immediate family to include everyone within the household, his wife, children, younger brothers and sisters, grandchildren, nephews, nieces, retainers and servants.

Patriarchy has carried over to entire political systems. A clear line ran from the patriarch of the family to the institutionalized leadership in the councils of elders, the "old man" or "city fathers", who ruled over associations of households. In history, war and conquest solidified political power in the hereditary chieftanship of the predominant patriarch and his sons. The gods, too, were part of the structure, Ms. Iglitzin points out, and in monotheistic societies, the one God became the Patriarch of the entire universe.

While in many parts of the world the patriarchal system no longer exists in its ancient forms, institutions inculcate patriarchal attitudes in new generations through retaining control over all the major agencies of social control, that is, churches, schools, governments or families.

Sexism is inherent not only in the socialization processes which gear women to marriage and the family, but in double standards of sexual permissiveness and the kind of job discrimination which results in lower pay and status for women. Those who are soft, nurturing and apolitical are rewarded for going along. Ms. Iglitzin points out that sex-role stereotyping goes far beyond the

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work world. It carries over into areas of self-identity and self-definition. In fact, the "desirable" traits of "feminine" women seen from a man's point of view are those characteristics of a good servant: cheerfulness, dutifulness, resignation and submission.

Ms. Iglitzin points to a recent study of elementary school children in the United States. The girls in the sample seemed unable to visualize their future apart from marriage and family, while boys were exclusively job and career oriented. While only 6 per cent of the girls named "housewife and mother" as a career choice, when asked to describe a typical day after they grew up, housewifely routines figured predominantly. One little girl started her future day like this: get up, get dressed, straighten up the house, get husband's lunch ready, awaken husband, help husband get off to work, get big girl up, help children get off to school, and so on for forty items, spelling out a routine which involved helping, serving, cleaning, feeding, and picking up after the family, including house pets!

It should come as no surprise that a recent International Labour Office report from Geneva showed that women have a long way to go before they achieve equality of opportunity in terms of employment, education and training, career advancement and pay, not to mention a voice in government.

The ILO report states that "the continuing failure to give women equal pay for equal work is described in the report as one of the most blatant forms of discrimination against women. The principle has been almost universally accepted. But it is still far from being applied in practice, and, as the survey notes, there is evidence of the stubborn persistence of the subtler types of discrimination which are hard to grasp, hard to fight and hard to eliminate."

Not that there remains much open resistance to the principle of equal pay. The ILO was a pioneer in advocating the elimination of pay abuses between the sexes. Its Equal Remuneration Convention of 1951 has been ratified by 78 governments which thus commit themselves to seeing that it is implemented in sectors under their control and to encouraging its application in the private sector. It should be noted that the United States has ratified none of the conventions relating specifically to women's rights.

"Equal pay is one basic step forward", says the ILO report, and goes on to quote the British Prime Minister who said some time ago: "Laws can be made laying down that women should be paid equally for equal work, but a revolution is needed in the hearts and minds of men if equal job evaluation is to be translated into real equality. Equal pay legislation, although vital, is only the beginning."

The answer to "How far do we have to go?" is, I am afraid, "Very far indeed."

It is as mistaken to generalize about the world's women, as about the world's men. Women make up over half the population. Women executives and professionals are the glittering exceptions to the rule, and I would

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not be surprised if when they looked into their childhood patterns, they would find that their parents encouraged them to be independent, brave and forthright.

There are wide divergences between women's participation in government --- in the Soviet Union, for example, 34 per cent of the Parliament, the Supreme Soviet, is made up of women, compared to less than five percent in many western states.

And there are many misconceptions. One is that women in the highly industrialized countries inevitably hold better positions than women in the developing countries. In Argentina, in a study made in 1965, half the dentists are women, 20 per cent of the lawyers (compared to 4 per cent in the United States), 20 per cent of the medical doctors (compared to United States' 7 per cent), 12 per cent of the agronomists, 38 per cent of the chemists, and 20 per cent of the veterinarians. In Guinea and Tanzania women are playing vital roles to build their countries, and changes involving women's participation in the decision-making process are going on at the village level. In other societies, such as Ghana, women play a key role in the marketing function, too; and Ghana counts women as judges, businesswomen, and even village chiefs, on occasion.

Nonetheless, there are certain characteristics of rural women which are strikingly similar, whether the women are from Iran, Upper Volta or Pakistan.

Let us focus on a woman in Upper Volta, for example. A typical day in the life of a rural woman begins at 4 or 5 a.m.. With her baby on her back, she walks up to 10 kilometers to get to the well to prepare the morning meal. After breakfast she goes with her husband to the field where she works strenuously, often more than 10 hours, ploughing, planting, or harvesting, while her husband works for 4 hours and then rests in a shady spot. On the way home she collects firewood needed to cook the evening meal; and after grinding and pounding the grain, she leaves the house again to get water. When she returns, she cooks the evening meal. She spends little time eating since she must care for the men and older children before going to bed. By nightfall she falls on her bed, exhausted, ready for sleep.

A rural woman spends up to 16 hours a day working in the field and doing the chores at home. This cycle is only punctuated briefly for childbearing.

At least 60 per cent of the world's population live in rural areas. In Africa and in Asia, women do most of the agricultural work. In Niger, 96 per cent of the economically active women are employed in agriculture. In Gabon, 94 per cent. In the Syrian Arab Republic, 86 per cent. In Nepal, 97 per cent. In Pakistan, 86 per cent. In one region of the Congo there are 18,000 male cultivators and 38,000 female cultivators. On a regional basis, a higher percentage of women are farmers in Asia than in Africa.

Women are not taken into account in economic planning in many developing countries. Being outside the money economy, such a heavy list of duties does not characterize women as being economically active. There is a disregard of women as a crucial human resource. The Green Revolution, with its promise of higher yields, frequently leaves the woman agricultural worker worse off than before as it requires highly organized farming methods only taught to men.

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Further, it is the rural women who have the most children. It is the rural women who are the most illiterate. Women constitute 500 million of the 800 million illiterates in the world. Their lack of education makes it hard to be reached with family planning information.

The answer, then, to our third question, namely, "What are the consequences of women's equality to the world's population problem?" is that rampant population growth, evidenced in some areas of the world, is closely related to the fact that at present there are no alternate roles for women to play. Where women play a major role as wage labourers, the birth rate declines.

As Mrs. Sipila, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations has said, "The World Population Year--1974 and International Women's Year which follows are two sides of the same coin. Without the one, we can hardly hope to achieve the objectives of the other. Women cannot hope to solve population problems until women are able to extend their roles in society. Thus, it can be said that the best contraceptive in the world is the over-all improvement in the status of women." I find it truly significant that to extend human rights to women is no longer a do-good proposition. Our very survival on the planet may depend on it.

What does this mean to NGOs?

Many NGOs have a long and proud record of supporting women's literacy and many other projects closely related to the United Nations, UNICEF and UNESCO. Women in Ecuador, Jamaica and elsewhere have learned to read and write through this help.

But I would suggest the following points:

1. The Second United Nations Development Decade strategy suggested that a minimum contribution by Member States to economic development should be 1 per cent of that country's gross national product. While some governments (notably the Scandinavian governments, the Netherlands, and Canada) have set this goal, others (such as the United States) have not. I would urge that you support every effort to achieve this minimum of support on behalf of your governments, where governments have not yet responded to the Second Development Decade targets.

2. You should urge individual members of your organizations to give 1 per cent of the gross income to helping developing countries and to women in particular during International Women's Year. Contributions made to the United Nations Association of the United States and earmarked for International Women's Year will be tax deductible.

3. Very important! Educated women in developing countries should form committees to work with the government in training rural women to become leaders, to bring the news of better living habits, family planning, and better nutrition to every woman in every country. This is an overwhelming task, but one which I know with your energy and power you can help to resolve. In this connexion, I should like to share the new programme of one non-governmental organization with you. The programme emphasis, "Women Helping Women", calls upon the organization's 969 clubs in 13 countries to enter a study-action programme aimed at correcting existing discrimination against women. Members are asked to spend a year of study, and a year of service in one of 10 key

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areas: economic, legal, governmental, religious, needs of women prisoners, women on welfare and the mature women; as well as the equal availability of scholarships and athletic programmes. In announcing her Programme, the organization's president presented a new "Women Helping Women" award programme that will span the federation. Each club is asked to recognize, in a public ceremony, a woman in its community who has given great and unusual help to women - whether by top personal achievement or by action that has directly benefited other women. Nominations will come from business and industries in those cities and towns where the organization's clubs exist - all the way from Peru to New York to Osaka, Japan.

For those of you with international affiliations, I should think it useful to extend organizational help to rural women. One of the important programmes during the year will be an extension of the Economic Commission for Africa programme which reaches out to women in that area, giving grass roots help on nutrition, health, and other subjects, and teaching handicrafts so that rural women may break out of their matrix of despair and earn a small wage.

4. You use the International Women's Year as a point of departure to make both men and women realize that women's self-fulfilment and views are inter-related, that in the long run men have more to gain in a more humane and less crowded world through giving women an active role in society than they do under the present circumstances. As Margaret Mead said recently: "Every time we liberate a woman, we liberate a man!"

5. This question is addressed to women in executive positions. Looking around you in your organization, are you the only woman among many men? Do you have what one woman referred to as the "queen bee" syndrome--- a secret delight in being the only woman making it in a man's world? Try during International Women's Year to work actively to open your business and profession to other women. Make allowances for the fact that not all women have had the same opportunities as you have.

There are other activities relating to NGOs. One has written a moving church service in recognition of International Women's Year; it brings to light some astonishing prejudices, including the Talmud prayer: "Thank God I am not a woman...."! Another's call for action to liberate rural women in the two-thirds world is gaining momentum and promises, as you have seen, to be one of the main thrusts of the year. Still another is publishing a bi-monthly newsletter devoted to International Women's Year. The first issue contains a stirring manifesto from a group of Spanish working women, which begins:

-- Women in this human world are in general considered as "second-class persons";

-- Working women make up more or less the whole of the sub-proletariate in every country;

-- What is called the Third World is not so much a geographical area as a cruel reality in which most of the world's women are to be found.

There are many other examples, including the fine work of your own NGO International Women's Year Committee. I know that Mrs. Sipila counts very heavily on all of your actions to make the year a success.

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We meet at a time of unprecedented change and of striking contrasts. Societies are being transformed before our very eyes. In the past century the speed of human travel has increased by 100 times, the power of energy by 1,000 times, the power of weapons by one million times, and the speed of communication by ten million times. On the other hand, half the world's villages are without electricity or water.

Distances are shrinking, and the voices you raise here can be heard around the world. Using all the modern means at our disposal, it is an exciting challenge to help to build a more equitable world, wherein the new society all of the humans living in it might have a chance to develop to their full potential. This momentum towards greater realization for women, towards greater expression, promises a 100 per cent increase in the brainpower and the emotion power which will be available towards building a more humane and equitable future for all.

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