

AE7

Rev AEF



United Nations Decade Of Women



Many of us have never heard of the UN Decade of Women. What did the women achieve over the last 10 years? What did the Decade of Women mean for us in South Africa?

At a conference hosted by the Federation of Cuban Women in November 1984, the Latin American and Caribbean women discussed the gains of the Decade. They agreed that we understand the problems that women suffer better. Now, women participate more actively in political and social movements. New laws have opened the way for women's progress. The women noted that democratic and dictatorial states differ in how they take responsibility for progress in health, education and employment. But they concluded that the Decade ends in a period of world economic crisis. National plans for development and for improving women's lives have failed. The root causes have led to growing social and political movements. The regimes have responded by increased militarisation of Latin America. The Latin American women said that in the inequality of the majority of women is linked to the international and national economic and political structures. So they will take the demand to extend the Decade of Women to the year 2 000 to the Nairobi conference in June this year.

Let us look at what happened in the Decade. The UN declared 1975 'International Women's Year'. They held a conference in Mexico. This conference decided it would take a Decade to build equality of women, so they chose the themes Women, Equality, Development and Peace for 1976-1985. In 1980, a second conference in Denmark added the themes health, education and employment.

The women at this conference took a stand on Apartheid in SA and Namibia. They pledged their support for the women's section of the national liberation movements; they supported the women in detention, political prisoners and those in exile. In May 1982, there was an International Conference in Women and Apartheid in Brussels. This conference sent a delegation of women to the European governments to

tell them of the lives of women under Apartheid. They asked the governments to provide material support for the liberation movement. We salute the contribution these women make to our struggle. But let us look at what we have done to improve the lives of our women- young women, old women, women workers, unemployed women, mothers, women in squatter camps and rural areas. How have we moved the women's struggle forward?

The UN has asked SA's women's organisations to send five delegates to the 1985 Conference in Nairobi. There will be workshops on rural women, migrant women, refugee women, young women, older women. These South African women will represent all of the women in UDF - women from COSAS, CAYCO, WCCA, all UDF affiliates. Can we say that we have really organised women? Are the problems of our women members really addressed in an organisational programme of action?

The UN Decade of Women focuses on women's inequality in health, education and employment. In 1975, 1980, and again this year, there are two conferences: one for official government reps to the UN and one for reps from other organisations in the countries. The government conference is mainly men. At the non-government conference, there is a range of women, all with different problems, who come together to find solutions. But there are many different women with different ideologies and different ways to solve women's problems. Domitila from Bolivia was angry when she had to listen to women talk about their personal lives. She said: "Those weren't my interests. And for me it was incomprehensible that so much money should be spent to discuss those things in the conference. Because I'd left my companero (husband) with the seven kids and him having to work in the mines everyday. I'd left my country to let people know what my homeland is like, how it suffers, how in Bolivia the charter of the United Nations isn't upheld." The UN campaign cannot change women's lives.

So why do we in SA take up this theme and other UN campaigns like IYY? The UN has called on organisations all over the world to build women's participation in all projects. We can learn from the struggles of women in other countries, and we can use this 1985 theme to assess our own struggle. Only 33 out of every 100 black women in SA have jobs. 57 out of every 100 African women starve in the homelands. Women's right to maternity leave and childcare are not recognised. Young girls are sexually harassed by their teachers. Young girls leave school early to look after the younger children. Half the women in SA cannot

read or write. Comrades we have a long way to go. The UN conferences, even extending the decade until the year 2000, will mean nothing, unless we fight for women's rights in every sphere.

It is not enough for us to say that the question of women should be looked at by women's organisations. It is a question that affects all our organisations because there are women in all our organisations. In the next year we'll be taking up a number of campaigns - IYY, Freedom Charter, Housing, Education Charter campaign. How can we organise women around these issues? How can we make these campaigns relevant to women all over? When we set our goals for these campaigns, we must aim to organise women. Every part of the programme of action for these campaigns must see how to overcome the problems that hold women back from participating. Let us make sure that we do not make a token week or big day for women in these campaigns, but that we look at the lives and demands of women all along the way.

Women's problems are the people's problems. In our struggle we lay the basis for a future society. We want women to be active and equal members of a free South Africa. We must start laying that basis now in all our organisations.

Collection Number: AK2117

DELMAS TREASON TRIAL 1985 - 1989

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand**

Location: **Johannesburg**

©2012

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of the collection records and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of a private collection deposited with Historical Papers at The University of the Witwatersrand.