

CONFERENCE REPORT
"WOMAN, PROCREATION, AND ENVIRONMENT,"
RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, 30 SEPTEMBER-7 OCTOBER
1991

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The conference on "Woman, Procreation, and Environment," concerned with the ethical, social, and biological implications of reproductive and genetic technological developments, arose out of the international meeting held at Comilla, Bangladesh in March 1989. The Comilla Conference provided a framework for the Brazil meeting, as it was the first discussion of these issues in a southern country as a result of an initiative by the international women's movement. The very positive impact of the meeting at Comilla led some participants of the organization "Rede de Defesa de Espécie Humana" (REDEH) (Humankind Defence Network) to believe that the women's movement in Latin America also should be informed about and take a position in relation to genetic and technological developments in human reproduction.

The organization of the international conference in Brazil was part of a larger project, extending over 2 years, in which the discussion of these topics and issues were encouraged through three types of activities:

1. A documentation centre was opened to the women's movement, and used to provide information for publications.
2. Publications: The quarterly bulletin *Gente* and the publication *Cuadernos de REDEH*.
3. Seminars were organized in conjunction with other women's nongovernmental organizations, and attended by women from organizations of the people in Brazil and other countries of Latin America.

Concern with ethics and the environment arising out of the use of many technologies led REDEH to take the leadership in a pioneering

action, named "Woman and Environment." This initiative, concerned with the realization of the *ONU's* Conference on "Environment and Development," to be held in Brazil (UNCED), in June 1992, provoked a great interest among social movements. The conference on "Woman, Procreation, and Environment" was deliberately held in advance of the Environment and Development UNCED-92 Conference in order that aspects vital to women could be discussed and women's views could be developed for introduction into the UNCED-92 deliberations.

Two hundred and eighty women, from 39 countries around the world and representing different continents, cultures, races, and religions, met in Alto da Boa Vista, in Rio de Janeiro, to discuss developments in modern science during the week of 30th September-7th October. The conference was organized around two basic topics, biological industrialization and the feminization of life. There were working groups on "Politics of Population and Environment"; "Developments in Genetic Engineering" and its ethical, social, and biological implications; "Feminization of Life"; and "New Feminist Strategies within an Ecological Perspective." Women spoke about the "Transforming Logic of Feminism" and "Women's Alternatives in Sustaining Economies."

The different points of view and the difficulty of the topics resulted in several documents produced during the meeting. *Women From South and North, a Dialogue; Abortion, the Other Version of the Crime; and Reflections on New Technologies on*

Reproduction were written by a group of Latin American women.

The *Alto de Boa Vista Vision Statement* was written in many languages, and it anticipates women's concerns for the 21st century. It states: After a century of our struggles for social, economic and political justice we remain dissatisfied.

Politics, science and economy continue to be determined by a dominant world view that is shaped by patriarchy, race and class. These values are responsible for the violence against women and nature.

We women at the Conference are concerned about the threat of industrialization and commodifications of all life. We refuse to accept the concept of life that destroys effective links and human relationship among whole populations. We also reject the concept of progress that has been transformed into global terrorism. This society is fundamentally based on egotism, competition and power relations; it can only breed ever more violence and brutality which affect particularly women, children and all that are considered weak. The developments of new reproductive technologies and genetic engineering are just examples of this inbuilt barbarism.

If we want a society that respects human dignity and nature we need a transformation that goes beyond the demand of equality. Such a transformation would mean women and men becoming responsible for the care and preservation of everyday life and thereby finding new possibilities for our times.

Therefore, we declare, we want to recover our interconnectedness as relation between human beings that has been transformed into a commodity by modern science, technology and the laws of the market economy.

We want to restore the essence of sacredness which has sustained human relations for so long and nurture the ministry of life through the path of imagination and hopes.

We want" to restore the dignity of women

The population-equals-environmental-

and nature which has been used and abused according to the logic of the market.

We want to restore joy and happiness that cannot be translated in the consumptions of wealth and status.

We want to redefine wealth in an ecological framework, peace in a new meaning of people's security and development in the fulfillment of basic human needs. This vision statement was written by Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira (Brazil), Maria Mies (Germany), Corinne Kumar de Souza (India), Thais Corral (Brazil), Farida Akhter (Bangladesh), Ute Wrinkler (Germany), Ana Re-gina Reis (Brazil), Martha Rans (Canada), and Christine Ewing (Australia).

The debate about population and the environment was very well attended during the conference. Also, Brazilian women chose this topic for continued work during the whole of the UNCED-92 process.

The debate about population starts from the knowledge that the poor, who largely live in the Southern Hemisphere, are seen by governments, international agencies, and some environmentalists as those mainly responsible for environmental degradation. Population control as a fundamental measure to contain the increasing shortage of resources is logically associated with this view. This analysis is impregnated with catastrophic tones. The report of the United Nations Fund for Population Action, *The State of World Population 1990*, was discussed by Maria Mies. The view of this report is encapsulated in the following quote:

World Population is growing at a rate of three people per second or a quarter of a million people per day. This is faster than at any time in history. The most rapid growth is in developing countries. But will the earth's damaged environment be able to sustain such numbers in the 1990s and beyond?

catastrophe analysis does not take into account

the consumption patterns of industrial countries, which are the main cause of environmental problems. It is not said, for example, that the United States, 6% of the world population, utilizes 30% of the annually produced petroleum. Neither does it mention that one fourth of the world's population living in industrial countries – North America, Europe, and Japan – consume three quarters of the world energy production and is largely responsible for carbon dioxide emissions that adversely affect the ozone layer. The development pattern of industrial countries is the only possible explanation for environmental degradation, and all our worries spring from that.

The topic of population and the environment also mobilized women's attention during the "World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet," when 1,400 women from 87 countries met from the 8th to the 12th of November in Miami, Florida. The final document, *Women's Action Agenda 21* (see p. 197 of this issue), was given to the Secretary of the UNCED, Maurice Strong. Women

declared they felt outraged by suggestions that women's fertility rates (euphemistically called "population pressures") are to be blamed. Women know that the major causes of environmental degradation are industrial and military pollutants, toxic wastes, and economic systems that exploit and misuse nature and people. The report urges governments and multilateral and donor agencies to increase investments in comprehensive reproductive health services and to include men as beneficiaries of family planning education and services. Family support services should include child care and parental leave.

1992 is a very busy year for organizing on woman and ecology. Women will hold an alternative conference, "Global Forum 1992," at the same time as the UNCED Official Conference in Brazil in June 1992. Women are planning an Activity Centre, to be called "The Female Planet," with continuous activities. On the sea shore in the early morning of the first day, women will make a symbolic celebration of the dawn, symbolizing the invested hopes in the next millennium.