

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS

monthly newsletter of the Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights

January 1996



(INTERCEDE)

WHAT DID MIGRANT WOMEN GET OUT OF BEIJING?

The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, from September 4 to 15, 1995 brought at least 180 governments to the end of more than a year of negotiations over a document called the Platform for Action.

This document lists 12 critical areas of women's lives where actions are required to advance their status so that women around the world can achieve equality, development and peace - the three repeated slogans of the conference.

Earlier, more than 30,000 women, mostly representing non-governmental organizations or NGOs, had met in a preceding Forum in Huairou, a tourist resort just outside Beijing. Without a doubt, the NGO Forum was the biggest assembly of the international women's movement in the 20th century!

In a formidable display of strength and commitment, NGO women raised their critical issues in plenaries, workshops, cultural activities, demonstrations and marches, holding more than 5000 events in two weeks. They educated, organized, demonstrated and celebrated together in a determined effort to influence the official negotiations on the Platform for Action.

Now that this document of 362 paragraphs has been finalized, its intended beneficiaries, the women of the world, have begun the process of assessing its worth.

The substance of what could be just scraps of paper lies in the hands of those responsible for imple-

Contd. Pg 2 - Beijing

YOUR LETTER CAN HELP FREE VERONIQUE

In 1990, twenty-three year old, Veronique Akobé, an African domestic worker in Nice, France was sentenced to 20 years in prison for killing her employer's son and wounding her prominent employer. They had raped her 3 times.

You may recall, INTERCEDE's November newsletter about the plight of 16 year old Sarah Balabagan, a domestic worker who was sentenced to death for killing in self-defense the employer who raped her.

In a bitter tasting victory for Sarah and her supporters, after already serving 15 months in prison, the UAE Appeals Court on October 30, 1995 overturned the death penalty but sentenced her to 100 lashes of the whip. Two weeks prior to the hearing the rapist's son had stated that his family would no longer insist that Sarah receive the death penalty and agreed to accept blood money totalling over US\$40,000.

As the Philippine Government begins to take a closer look at the export of their citizens as domestic labourers, women's organizations and advocates continue to demand further protection for migrant workers rights and are asking for our assistance to ensure that what has happened to the likes of Flor Contemplacion, Sarah and others does not happen again.

In July 1987, Veronique Akobé was raped and sodomized three-times by her rich industrialist employer, George Scharr and his 22 year old son,

Contd. Pg 2 - Veronique

You Are Welcome

DOMESTIC WORKERS AND CAREGIVERS

Live-in or live-out, caregiving in hospitals or senior homes, on temporary or open permit, immigrant or citizen

Next INTERCEDE Meeting, **Sunday, January 7, 1996**
3 to 5 p.m. Cecil Community Center, 58 Cecil St.
(one block South of College St. off Spadina Ave.)

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN HOUSING

2:30 - 3 pm Member Application & renewals of Member **ID 94-1297-94-1378**

From Pg 1 - Beijing

menting the prescriptions for women's equality in the next decade: Governments at every level, international institutions, the private sector, NGOs and other people's organizations, and individual women and men.

What's in it for Migrant Women Workers?

The first draft of the Platform for Action did not have a single reference to migrant or immigrant women nor to migrant women workers.

But because of the presence, the lobby work, and the persistence of migrant women's organizations and other NGO advocates, the Beijing document not only recognizes the existence of migrant women and migrant women workers, but directly includes their concerns in at least 22 paragraphs.

Clearly, however, even with the valiant efforts and untiring energy of the NGO women who trudged every step of the preparations leading to Beijing, there are serious and glaring omissions in the Platform.

Most importantly, there is no admission that the feminization of poverty, that has led to the feminization of migration, is rooted and inherent in the present global economic system. There is no recognition that the increasing poverty of women in the South stems from structural adjustment programs imposed on their deeply indebted countries by international financial institutions.

Consequently, there is no accountability whatsoever that is hinted at financial institutions and transnational corporations, the principal architects and beneficia-

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DID YOU CHANGE ADDRESS?

Please inform us by phone or mail so that you can continue getting your newsletter and we don't waste postage expenses for returned mail!

From Pg 1 - Veronique

Thierry. Veronique later stated that they had killed something in her, something of her true personality. On August 4, 1987 she killed to wash her honor.

Psychologist, Mrs. Nolle Maguad-Vouland explained that the results of tests and interviews of Veronique corresponded with those of most rape survivors. The clinical examination revealed lesions supporting rape. And, the medical report, completed seven months after the crime, concurred that the functional disorders described by Ms. Akobé were as a result of rape.

Yet, her own defense lawyer, who was assigned to her by default, did not base her defense on rape to explain the crime. Instead, he claimed that Akobé had killed in order to steal and that her reasoning for taking such action was somewhere in the unknown dimensions of her mind.

This defense seemed to complement the prosecution's claim that it was a crime of a lost woman, of inadaptation and of moral solitude. And even though the prosecution asked for the jury not to go beyond his already heavy penalty request of 15 years in prison, the jury decided to sentence Veronique Akobé to 20 years in prison.

Veronique has already served eight years and we are asking all members and supporters of INTERCEDE to send letters: 1. to condemn the unfairness of the trial and the harshness of the sentence 2. to demand that Veronique Akobé be freed immediately and 3. that Veronique be pardoned without deportation.

Every letter can help in this fight to free Veronique. Send your letter to: **Comite de soutien pour la grace de Veronique Akobé sans expulsion du territoire francais, c/o AVFT (Association européenne contre les violences faites aux femmes au travail), 71 rue St-Jacques, 75005 Paris. Fax: 45 83 43 93.**

TO ALL SUBSCRIBERS since Dec 1994 (Does not apply to current members)

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From Pg 2

ries of a world market economy that puts profits first above people, profits first above women in particular.

We will have to ask how can we find a solution for the increasing inequality and impoverishment of women if we do not agree on what causes the problem?

There are gains and losses

Migrant women's organizations that worked as a caucus in preparatory meetings before Beijing consistently called for signing, ratification and enforcement of the 1990 United Nations Convention for the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant workers and members of their families.

For this Convention to be binding, 20 governments must sign and ratify it. Egypt, Morocco and the Philippines are the only countries that have signed and ratified while three others have signed.

There was no progress made in this regard. Even the Philippine government that touted migrant workers rights as its "flagship issue" backpedaled on this demand once in Beijing. In explaining, Senator Leticia Shahani, head of the Philippine delegation, said: "You just do not go to a global conference and demand ratification....each delegation before arriving in Beijing had been given instructions from the capital....you can give 10 peking duck dinners and still nothing may happen."

In the Platform section on poverty, governments are committed to "ensuring the full realization of the human rights of all women migrants, including migrant workers, and their protection against violence and exploitation." Receiving countries particularly of the European Union tried but failed to distinguish documented from undocumented migrants in this provision.

However, this distinction is made where governments are asked to "introduce measures for the empowerment of documented women migrants, including women migrant workers, and facilitate the productive employment of documented migrant women through greater recognition of their skills, foreign education and credentials, and facilitate their full integration into the labour force."

In the sections on violence against women, it is acknowledged that women migrants and women migrant workers are "also particularly vulnerable to violence".

Among recommendations related to violence and human rights: law enforcement officers and personnel involved in migration and refugee issues are asked to be educated and sensitized on human rights and violence against women and governments and NGOs are asked to establish language and culturally accessible services for migrant women and girls, in-

cluding women migrant workers who are victims of gender-based violence.

Appropriate measures are recommended to ensure that "refugee and displaced women, migrant women and women migrant workers are made aware of their human rights and of the recourse mechanisms available to them.

The Platform invokes "special measures" to eliminate violence against specially vulnerable women such as women migrant workers, including "enforcing any existing legislation and developing, as appropriate, new legislation for women migrant workers in both sending and receiving countries."

Lacking is a clearly stated commitment to protect the right of migrant women, immigrants, refugees and other displaced women, documented or undocumented, to work in a safe environment - free of slavery, indentured servitude, exploitation and sexual harassment.

In the section on the economy, we can be happy about the inclusion of the following paragraph 156:

"Women migrant workers, including domestic workers, contribute to the economy of the sending country through their remittances and also to the economy of the receiving country through their participation in the labour force."

as well as the admission that

"migrant female workers remain the least protected by labour and immigration laws."

But the actions recommended (i.e. analyzing the gender-impact of economic policies or adopting policies to cover under labour and social security laws those who do paid work in the home) do not satisfactorily and directly address these problems.

A demand that was articulated by more than 50 groups in the preparatory meeting in Vienna is not reflected in the Platform. This demand sought to eliminate discrimination against women on the basis of their status in the country, in the application of protective laws on labour, social programs and gender equality.

Where do we go from here?

If not for the collectivity of voices that sought to include the issues of migrant women workers at every step of the road to Beijing, we would not have accomplished one thing: to make these issues visible and include them in the international dialogue of women and to push them onto the table of government negotiations.

The Platform for Action is only the beginning. Now we have to do the rest: monitor the implementation by our governments of the commitments they made in Beijing towards the attainment of equality for all the world's women.

INTERCEDE CHRISTMAS DINNER A SUCCESS!

People were hesitant to leave the merriment that had been taking place inside the Chinatown International Restaurant since 7 p.m. that chilly night of December 10th. The Christmas celebration of friends and members of INTERCEDE was an occasion for laughter, mouth-watering food, and warm feelings.

Winnie Ng, NAC executive member, was the host of the night, assisted by Fely Villasin, INTERCEDE coordinator. They set the mood of the evening as they introduced the program to about 180 guests present.

Denyse Stewart, INTERCEDE president, welcomed everyone and acknowledged the generous donors and supporters: Canadian Auto Workers, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), Women's Health in Women's Hands, Chinese Nurses Association and Chinese Canadian National Council, Carlos Bulosan Cultural Workshop, San Lorenzo Filipino-Canadian Community Centre, lawyers Jeff Abrams and Bayani Abesamis.

Many more friends and donors could not come but we thank them very much, among whom are: International Ladies Garment Workers Union, Lois Wilson of Urban Rural Mission, Judy Fudge, Toni Schweitzer, Mary Cornish, and many members who mailed in donations for the night.

Denyse called attention to the continuing campaign for Points for domestic workers in the Immigration Points system, and against the sponsorship head tax of \$975, and reiterated the right of domestic workers to enter Canada as landed immigrants instead of on temporary status.

Rose Japay Saito, chairperson of the INTERCEDE Caregivers Coop, Inc. gave an update of the Coop's activities and instructed the crowd on the raffle draw that offered more than 20 delightful prizes.

CONFLICTS IN NEWLY-SPONSORED FAMILIES

A WORKSHOP FOR IMMIGRANT WOMEN, CAREGIVERS AND DOMESTIC WORKERS

Facilitator: Pilipinas Support Network
Sunday, January 21, 1996 2 - 5 pm
Cecil Community Centre

We wish to thank the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Immigration Settlement and Adaptation Program); Canadian Heritage; Multiculturalism Program; Ontario Ministry of Citizenship; Ontario Ministry of Health; Ontario Ministry of the Environment; Ontario Women's Directorate; the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto (Community and Social Services); the City of Toronto Grants Review Board and United Way of Greater Toronto for their financial support.

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c/o INTERCEDE

234 Eglinton Ave. East, Suite 205
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FIRST CLASS

Everyone's concentration was focused on Sunera Thobani, NAC president, who described the essential gains from the Beijing Conference. She stressed the need to continue the struggle for empowerment and equality of women as exemplified in the campaign to free Sarah Balabagan, the domestic worker who was sentenced to be executed for killing her rapist in the United Arab Emirates.

Past president of INTERCEDE, Cornelia Soberano and past treasurers, Yola Grant and Ginger Chung, also graced the night with their presence.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Sunday, February 4, 1996 3-5 pm

Topic: Putting Up Your Own Business

Sunday, February 18, 1996

Topic: ORIENTATION to Citizenship Rules

Sunday, March 3, 1996 3-5 pm

Topic: CITIZENSHIP AND YOU

CARIBBEAN GROUP MEETING

Topic: Preparing To Find A Job

Sunday, February 11, 1996 2:30 - 5 pm

at INTERCEDE office

Call Carol Tel. 483-4554

GRUPO HISPANA REUNION

Sunday, January 14, 1996 2 - 5 pm

INTERCEDE Office

Llame a Coco Tel. 483-4554

FREE! FREE! (For INTERCEDE Members only)

BEGINNERS COMPUTER COURSE

January 20, 1996 to May 4, 1996

Saturday / 1:30 - 5:45 pm

January 21, 1996 to May 5, 1996

Sunday / 1:30 - 5:30 pm

January 22, 1996 to April 29, 1996

Monday / 6:00 to 10:00 pm

For more information call 483-4554

Please book early, space for each schedule is limited

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

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Toronto, Ont. M4P 1K5

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