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“LOOK AT THE WORLD THROUGH WOMEN’S EYES!”

*This was the sign at the entrance to the NGO Forum at Huairou, China, 4 – 15 September 1995,
on the occasion of the Fourth World Conference on Women.*

For the past six years, the world has done just that, BUT NOT ENOUGH.

Boutros-Boutros Ghali, the UN Secretary-General at the time, had something vital to say at the conclusion of that World Conference.

The message of this Conference is that women’s issues are global and universal. Deeply entrenched attitudes and practices perpetuate inequality and discrimination against women, in public and private life, on a daily basis, in all parts of the world... The Platform for Action is a powerful agenda for the empowerment of women... (It) places heavy responsibilities on the United Nations system. It calls upon the UN organizations to play a key role in follow-up, implementation and monitoring. It poses a challenge to the capacity and commitment of the United Nations. As Secretary-General, I accept that challenge. ... Let us tell the world—and let us tell it with pride: the empowerment of women is the empowerment of all humanity! (<http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/off/a-20a1.en>).

Beijing set the year 2000 for review of the inter-national implementation of the Platform for Action. As in Beijing, women came by the

thousands to New York to review the “12 critical areas” (full text: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/ecn6-2000-pc-crp1.pdf>).

The Beijing+5 Review Conference, officially titled Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century, not only conducted a systematic review of the implementation during the past five years but also confronted the new concerns and priorities that came to light: violence against women, trafficking in women and children, the impact of globalization and the effects of HIV/AIDS.

In summarizing the review, Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the Conference:

All these challenges, old and new, can be met only if we enable women to build on the best our new world has to offer. That means above all, that women must be educated and enabled to play their part in the global economy. Education is both the entry point into the global economy and the best defense against its pitfalls. Indeed, study after study has confirmed that there is no development strategy more beneficial to the society as a whole—women and men alike—than one which involves women as central players. (SG/SM/ 7430)

WOMEN AND...
Poverty...Education...Health...
Violence...Economy...
Power and Decision-making...
Human Rights...Media...
Environment...Armed Conflict...
The Girl Child...Institutional
Mechanisms for their Advance-
ment

Beijing and Beijing+5 Review took place as the result of a slow but progressive process. The movement for gender equality of the late 20th century is closely linked to the human rights movement. The world-wide movement for equality took new impetus from the birth of the United Nations and the promulgation of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, it was not until the preparation for the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975 that the international community took systematic stock of the inequities that continued to render women second-class citizens in every country, including the industrialized democracies of the western world.

On December 18, 1979, for the first time in history, women's rights took codified form in an international human rights instrument, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which finally came into force on September 3, 1981.

Article I gives the encompassing spirit behind CEDAW:

The term "discrimination against women" shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>)

Between 1975 and 2000 there have been five UN World Conferences on women. The one underlying message in all is to demonstrate the impact of women's participation at the decision-making level in processes of governance.

Feminization of Poverty

The feminization of poverty manifests itself differently in different contexts. In many instances, women suffer disproportionately from the impact of globalization on their livelihoods. With the liberalization of the economy, multinational corporations have entered into the production of goods earlier made by the poor, women in particular, pushing poor women out of their traditional niches. Being the main victims of poverty, women, especially those living in poverty and at the grassroots, should be included in all efforts at poverty reduction.

Women and Good Governance

Greater levels of transparency and accountability are necessary to strengthen good governance. The Ugandan experience shows what women can do in this endeavor. With a push from its Women's Caucus, the Ugandan Parliament made it mandatory that funds allocated for communities must be made public. A recent World Bank study indicating a decrease in corruption in government may be linked to an increase in women's political participation. (*Policy Research Report on Gender and Development*, <http://www.worldbank.org/gender/prr/wp4.pdf>)

Women and Conflict Management

In commemoration of International Women's Day on March 8, 2001, a special event entitled *Women and Peace: Women Managing Conflicts* was held at the UN headquarters highlighting the lack of women in peacekeeping leadership positions, the importance of empowering women as a development policy, and the connection between women's rights and peace. Moreover, the International Women's Year and this year's observance both had as their focus Resolution 1325 on *Women, Peace and Security*, which was adopted by the UN Security Council on October 31, 2000.

Just seven weeks after the adoption of the UN Millennium Declaration by 189 Heads of State and Heads of Government in the Millennium Summit, five organizations—Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPE), International Alert (IA), Amnesty International (AI), Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (WCRWC), the Hague Appeal for Peace and the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)—pressed the UN Security Council for a resolution calling for gender sensitivity in all UN missions including peacekeeping, so as to pave the way for women to participate equally at all negotiating tables and to provide greater protection for women and girls during and after conflicts. Their achievement was a historic victory for women and therefore for all humankind. **Now we are challenged to hold our governments accountable. WOMEN COUNT AT LAST!** This is the victory cry of the millennium by women across continents.

Resolution 1325 provides a new and fresh blueprint for women's rights. (full text: <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/2000/res/1325e>.)

pdf). In this resolution, the Security Council points to a key strategy by expressing its “willingness to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations, and urges the Secretary-General to ensure that, where appropriate, field operations include a gender component.” (#5)

Moreover, it also urges Member States to adopt the following strategies:

- *to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict (#1)*
- *to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls, and in this regard stresses the need to exclude these crimes, where feasible from amnesty provisions (#11)*

And finally, UN Resolution 1325 calls on all parties involved:

- *to respect fully international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls (#9)*
- *to protect women and girls from gender-based violence particularly rape and other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict (#10)*
- *to respect the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and settlements and to take into account the particular needs of women and girls, including in their design (#12)*
- *to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependents in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (#13)*

Volodymyr Yel'Chenko (Ukraine), the president of the Security Council, paid tribute to the very important contribution of women from all parts of the world to protecting humankind. He said:

The UN Charter held a far-sighted promise of equality for women and men.... However, even now, ... women's wisdom and talents had not yet received the appropriate recognition. ... Let us have a critical look at this still very man dominated organ that has the primary responsibility for the

maintenance of international peace and security — the Security Council.” (<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2001/obv194.doc.htm>)

Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in his address on International Women's Day, underlines the importance of this resolution:

“As the resolution adopted by the Security Council makes clear, we must address the issue of women, peace and security on several fronts. While women are often the first victims of armed conflict, they must also be recognized as a key to the solution. It is increasingly realized that women possess particular skills and experiences that enable them to contribute to all stages of a peace process. In times of conflict, it is often women who take over the running of homes, farms and villages. Women understand the root causes of tension and know which power groups within communities and countries are most likely to support peace initiatives. Women are able to work together and communicate across barriers and divides. We must make greater use of that potential ... essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security in the 21 st century. On this International Women's Day of 2001, let that be our credo for a more peaceful millennium.”

(Press Release, UNDPI, SG/SM/7726, OBV/ 193, WOM/1262)

Resolution 1325 concludes briefly with Article #18: The Security Council “Decides to remain actively seized of the matter.” So be it for the Security Council, and indeed, for all humanity of succeeding generations.

All this confirms that VIVAT International's second issue of focus on WOMEN is a CRY that is heard across all the continents and it demands our full and attentive listening.

NEWSBITS FROM VIVAT INTERNATIONAL, NEW YORK

1 May. Sister Agada Brand, Congregational Leader of the SSpS visits VIVAT International (VI), New York. Her visit to the United Nations, Global Education Associates and Franciscans International complemented her first hand experience of VIVAT's activities and challenges.

7, 9 May. Lawrence meets with VIVAT International members. As part of his trip to Europe, Lawrence met with 20 SVDs on May 7 in St. Augustin, Germany and with 18 SSpS and SVDs on May 9 in Teteringen, Netherlands. The meetings were meant to disseminate information about the UN, its goals, activities and issues among members of VI and to explore possibilities for networking and advocacy.

10-20 May. VI participates in the 3rd UN Conference on Least Developed Countries (UN LDCIII). On the whole, the conference did not live up to expectations. No further steps were made for debt cancellation and there is no increase in Official Development Assistance (ODA) except for a promised increase by Sweden. However, there is a promise that ODA will be less tied in the future, and the European Union agreed to open its market to all LDC products and to remove tariff and non-tariff requirements, except for sugar, rice and products related to arms. The Conference and the NGO Forum recognized women in relation to poverty, their greater responsibility in the production of food, and their need for access to credit, training, etc. **(Full report on the VIVAT International website: <www.vivatinternational.org>).**

Lawrence Correa, SVD has been selected as a member of the International Steering Committee called CIVIL SOCIETY LDCIII WATCH. VI members especially those from the LDCs, are encouraged to get in touch with Lawrence on issues and activities related to the LDCs.

21 – 26 May. VI Executive Team joins the Workshop on “Religious Life and Global Concerns: Role of Religious Institutes at the UN and World Bank” held at Maryknoll, New York. Fifty religious and lay associates representing 25 religious congregations participated in the workshop. Discussions were focused on the role of religious institutes as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at international institutions.

29 May to 4 June. VIVAT International at the Grassroots Women's International Academy. For the first time, the UN headquarters witnessed a significant presence of grassroots women from across the continents.

Sr. Ma. Carmen represented VIVAT International. Women participants simply “told their stories” of experiences and lessons learned from “best practices” in the field. A statement was also formulated which included the affirmation that:

Development is sustainable when it is rooted in the local, addresses everyday issues and remains connected to neighborhood and community networks. When women take leadership roles in local government, corruption is reduced and solutions that are more in harmony with the whole community as well as the natural environment are developed. Development lies in rebuilding community which in the south often means reconnecting to local traditions and practices.”

These women strongly support the *Global Campaign on Secure Tenure*, a follow-up to the UN Human Rights Commission resolution of April 2001, on “women's equal ownership of, access to and control over land and the equal rights to own property and to adequate housing.”

VIVAT International acknowledges the following initial communication from our members at large:

SVD Poland, SSpS EU Council, SVD JPIC-Philippines South, SSpS Argentina North, SVD JPIC South America Zone, SVD Mangyan Mission, PHN, SSpS JPIC Philippines North, Urban Community Development Center, Mumbai (Bombay), an NGO managed by SVDs, SSpS Taiwan, SVD JPIC Japan and Ladislav Nemet, SVD, who is working in the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the International Organizations in Vienna, CARITAS QUILMES (SVD-directed Diocesan Org. Buenos Aires, Argentina).

The SVD-SSpS JPIC coordinators in Europe will hold their first millennium assembly in Dueñas, Spain on 24 – 29 September 2001 and have requested the collaboration of VIVAT NY.

We welcome articles in line with our issues of focus and your stories from the grassroots for the VIVAT HOMEPAGE.