

United Nations: 50 Years - 1995

Hear, ye peoples, All of you Harken, O earth, and all that therein is... (Micah 1:2)

Issue

At a time of celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations, questions are raised regarding changes for its future and the United States arrears on UN dues payments. The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing focused attention on women's issues, e.g., the girl child, older women and violence against women, and the work of UN specialized agencies in programs for women.

Background

We have lived and live through history, as history has lived and lives through us, to paraphrase the poet Adrienne Rich. As Jews, our faith teaches us that God works through history, with us as co-partners in ongoing creation. We have lived and continue to live through tumultuous, rapidly changing times. This historical year, 1995, marks the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations, a major force in world relations. Were the UN not to exist, the people of the world would have to create it to facilitate communication and cooperation among nations. We, Women of Reform Judaism, understanding the complexity of international interdependence, recognize the frailties of the UN in bringing about an era of peace. These criticisms exist in spite of the more than 172 peaceful settlements of conflict and the enabling of free elections in over 45 countries. There have been discussions that changes are necessary for more effective functioning of the world body. The United Nations and a number of specialized agencies are in the process of self-evaluation. Changes in the bureaucracy have been initiated and will continue over the next few years. At the same time we commend the many achievements of this almost universal organization in humanitarian affairs, economic and social development and in the spotlight cast upon emerging issues, among them the environment, human rights, population, older persons, child health and safety and women's concerns. Such projects are costly. Arrearage on payments to the UN, such as the \$1.2 billion owed by the United States, severely hampers the UN. We reiterate our support of the United Nations, as stated in many previous resolutions.

This is a particularly historic moment for Women of Reform Judaism to join the special United Nations focus on women. The Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing (the Governmental Conference on September 4-15, and the NGO Forum on August 30-September 8, 1995). The themes of equality, development and peace promoted during the Women's Decade, 1975-1985, were considered for continuing action. We salute two of our members who attended the Conference, which brought together some 35,000 women from around the world for a governmental conference and a non-governmental forum. In over 5,000 workshops, plenary sessions and special events, the basic concerns of women and families everywhere were addressed: adequate health care, economic opportunity, human and political rights. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW, for which WRJ continues to be an advocate, was a central policy document.

In the Beijing Platform for Action there is special mention of the worldwide situation of older women (viewed from a life-cycle perspective with a focus on causes and effects of economic and cultural policies) and the needs of the girl child (related to poverty, health, violence, access to education and human rights). UN specialized agencies have increased their awareness of and their programs for women. Among these agencies are: UNICEF, the United Nations's Children's Fund, whose programs feature the role of women in health care,

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nutrition, education, community development and other areas; and UNIFEM, the UN Development Fund for Women, which supports income-producing projects for women as well as women's access to credit and participation in decision making for local and national economic and social development (WRJ is a sponsor of UNIFEM). Women's issues appear increasingly on the agendas of UN conferences. The Platform for Action for Beijing in its Statement of Mission aims "to accelerate the removal of the remaining obstacles to women's full and equal participation in all spheres of life." Key provisions include women's right to decide freely all matters related to their sexuality and child bearing, freedom from violence against women, freedom of girl children from discrimination, access to credit and economic power, inheritance and protecting women from being discriminated against because they are mothers.

Resolution

Reaffirming prior resolutions relating to the United Nations, women's concerns and other interrelated humanitarian international issues, Women of Reform Judaism calls upon affiliates worldwide to:

- 1) Express recognition of the achievements of the United Nations and continue support for strengthening its future through statements and programs.
- 2) Call on the UN to become leaner and more efficient, taking on fewer tasks and performing them more effectively for less money.
- 3) Urge their governments, if regular dues and peacekeeping payments to the UN are in arrears (as in the United States), to pay the UN what is owed and to maintain payment of their share of UN costs at least at current levels.
- 4) Collaborate with women's organizations after Beijing to plan report-back events.
- 5) Present programs to promote awareness of the outcome and actions of the Fourth World Conference on Women.
- 6) Educate on human rights of women, including actions to end violence against women.
- 7) Raise awareness of the effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women.
- 8) Promote a life-span approach to health and education, in connection with local and national health institutions and schools.
- 9) Advocate the full participation of women in political and economic decision making.
- 10) Recognize efforts to balance work and family responsibilities of both women and men.
- 11) Study the situation of older women and the girl child locally, nationally and internationally, for possible actions.
- 12) Support the participation of the non-governmental sector, including WRJ, as a partner in building communities locally, nationally and internationally.

Further WRJ calls upon its affiliates worldwide to urge their respective governments to implement the platform of action agreed upon by the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women to empower all women through full realization of their human rights and freedoms.