

WOMEN ARE THE MOTHERS OF EARTH

BY THE WORLD WOMEN'S CONGRESS
FOR A HEALTHY PLANET

*I swear it to you
On my common woman's head,
The common woman
Is as common
As a common loaf of bread...
And will rise.*

~Judy Grahn



LUCIA HWONG

The major necessity of the 21st Century is to complete the social and personal equality of women, which transcends every other pressing equity because it is the most basic correction for humanity to make as well as the most potent force to successfully fulfill virtually everything else that needs to be done.

Though we are a single species our genders have separate stories — fundamentally and literally one is of life, the other of death; of persuasion and connection versus force and supremacy. The male gender is out of control — so suffused with dominance and death it is the greatest danger to the survival of the species and also to life on the planet. The leavening influence of women is most likely the only key to our future on the planet as a world society and undoubtedly off-planet as well. Women, after all, were the real pioneers of the cultivation of grains and domestication of animals that produced civilization in the first place.

Ten years ago more than 1500 women from virtually everywhere on Earth attended 'The World Women's Congress For A Healthy Planet' in Florida USA. These women who called themselves "a privileged few" were at the conference "on behalf of those who could not be with us, the millions of women who experience daily the violence of poverty, environmental

degradation and exploitation of their work and bodies due to an international economic order that places capital before human and ecological well-being."

For four days they "listened to each other speak of the ills of our societies, our families and our sacred nature. We have been inspired by the courage and commitment of our sisters throughout the world who protect and repair our natural heritage."

They concluded that "in a world in which nature and women are systematically exploited by a so-called 'free market' ideology, there can be no environmental security." They wrote in a collective declaration that rain forest dwellers, island peoples, the inhabitants of fragile arid or Arctic zones, in particular "are threatened with displacement and dispossession due to human disruption and pollution of vulnerable ecosystems." And they urged the UN and world leaders, mostly male, to "increase their commitment to integrating women's perspectives at all levels and in all programs and policies."

These "privileged few" women from all nations issued the following recommendations as a basic guide to enhance environmental quality as well as human equality for the 21st Century which they hoped would be "a challenge to create a safe and sustainable future"

~MICHAEL McCUSKER

We believe that a healthy and sustainable environment is contingent upon respect for human rights, participatory democracy, self-determination of peoples, respect for indigenous peoples and their lands, cultures, traditions and the protection of all species.

We believe that basic human rights include access to clean air and water, food, shelter, health and well-being. These rights are currently denied to millions of people, the overwhelming majority of whom are women.

We are deeply troubled by the increasing inequities in the quality of life of those living in the industrialized nations and those of the so-called "developing" nations. We are outraged by the disparity between our children's nutrition, well-being, education and opportunities for a full and productive life. We condemn the racism and disrespect of diversity on which this inequity feeds.

We equate lack of political and individual will among world leaders, the great majority of whom are men, with a lack of basic morality and spiritual values and an absence of responsibility towards future generations.

Based on "economic growth" and ludicrous investments in weaponry, the current development model has wrought human and environmental degradation and destruction. Unbridled consumerism of the industrialized nations leads to unjust exploitation of the human and natural resources of poor nations, which results in coopting governments and the political process for the benefit of the few.

We come together to pledge our commitment to the empowerment of women, the central and powerful force in the search for equity between and among the peoples of the Earth and for a balance between them and the life support systems which sustain us all.

We appeal to all women and men to join in this call for profound and immediate transformation in human values and activities.

Recognizing that nature is not limited by national sovereignty or boundaries and that environmental degradation is global; observing the worldwide social and environmental consequences of development based solely on economic growth measurements; recognizing the creative diversity of our culture, class, race and the ecosystems and political structures within which we live; believing that the world's indigenous peoples have long been denied basic human rights or acknowledgment of their contributions to world culture; and recognizing the interconnectedness of women, the environment, economic policies, development strategies, social justice and the survival of all species:

We will demand full and equal participation for women and men in public policy analyses, government decision making, implementation, administration and funding at international and community levels.

We urge each other to seek to achieve a critical mass in government and nongovernmental policy making leadership positions, adopting the 60-40 formula (no more than 60% or no less than 40% of either sex) as a guide to our empowerment.

We demand that all governments comply with the requirements of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies and the

United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

In full knowledge that the industrialized nations have been the net beneficiaries of exploitation of the rich resources of the South; observing the disastrous social, environmental and economic consequences of international lending practices and current terms of trade between industrialized and nonindustrialized nations and concerned about the negative impact on the poor, especially women, of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank structural adjustment policies; ashamed by the flow of capital from poor nations to the banking system of rich nations and recognizing the grievous consequences of this practice for poor families in the South and for the natural resources upon which we all depend:

We demand immediate official debt forgiveness.

We will work for cancellation of commercial debt via mechanisms equivalent to corporate bankruptcy law.

We will cease to do business with banks that refuse to reschedule debt repayments of nations to the South.

We will oppose those debt for nature exchanges (swaps) which threaten sovereignty, indigenous peoples rights to lands and self-determination and which are not subject to wide public debate.

We will hold personally accountable those who borrow in the name of their people, for the social and environmental consequences of those loans.

We call for the rejection of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) which shift responsibility of basic social services from governments to women without compensation or assistance.

We call for the dismantling of all unfair protective trade measures used by the North against the South.

We call for renegotiation of terms of trade that will ensure an equitable relationship between the price of raw materials and prices of manufactured goods.

We demand a total ban on the export of goods rejected for local consumption (or destruction) in or by the country of origin.

We suggest that historic audits of nation-states (from 1945 onward) be conducted to determine the net beneficiaries of natural resource exploitation, an assessment which would serve as the basis to cancel current debt.

ELIZABETH A. BALDWIN

*is pleased to announce the relocation
of her office for the practice of law to
536 BOND STREET
ASTORIA OREGON 97103
Across the street from her old office
(503) 325-5173
Telephone number remains the same*

Recognizing the current moral and ethical double standards applied to environment, development, women's participation and social justice throughout the world and distressed that policy planners and political representatives have such barren instruments (systems of national accounts) on which to make all major economic and environmental decisions:

We will work for the adoption of an international code of environmental conduct for business and industry, for governments, for UN agencies and for nongovernmental organizations which will include regulations on bio-technical genetic engineering.

We will organize monitoring systems that will hold institutions and states accountable for their actions, products and policies.

We call for a reappraisal of national income accounts to reflect the balance between constructive and destructive production.

We totally oppose environmental accounting and the commodification of "free gifts of nature."

We demand time/use studies of women's work — household, cottage industries, subsistence agriculture, child care, elder care, volunteer community service.

We require governments, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and lending agencies to establish environmental audits with which every proposal must comply before implementation of loans.

We will endorse new proposals of international law, including strict liability for environmental harms and nonadversarial dispute resolution mechanisms to compensate victims.

Aware that the gross inequities in land tenure and ownership are primary causes of social injustice, poverty of women and their children, homelessness and environmental degradation, and the dispossession of indigenous people; aware that land ownership and control is becoming increasingly polarized; recognizing that current agricultural policies, in the North and in the South, are uprooting and displacing land-based communities and are diverting land from food production to cash crops for exports; and recognizing that in many communities the nutrition of the family is dependent upon women's ability to produce a family and domestic market food products, and that because women and children are an estimated 1,000,000,000 people in the world who go hungry every day, women's access to food and land tenure and ownership must be regarded as a basic human right:

We will call on the UN, governments and nongovernmental organizations to cease discriminating practices which limit women's access to land and other resources, to increase allocation of resources which enhance food security and provide appropriate technologies which reduce women's work.

We will strive to create awareness about the environmental impact of land use technologies guided by immediate profit at the cost of long-term sustainability and productivity.

We will search for ways to strengthen agricultural research of indigenous foods and conservation of local crop varieties.