

UN World Conference on Women

Representatives from 160 countries convened in Nairobi, Kenya, from July 15th until 26th, to participate in the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. The conference concluded by ratifying a 366 paragraph document entitled «Forward-looking Strategies of Implementation for the Advancement of Women for the Period up to the Year 2000, and Concrete Measures to Overcome Obstacles to the Achievement of the Goals and Objectives of the UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, and the Subtheme: Employment, Health and Education, Bearing in Mind the International Development Strategy for the Third UN Development Decade and the Establishment of a New International Economic Order.»

As reflected in this title, the themes of the Nairobi conference, like the two previous international women's conferences in Mexico City, 1975, and Copenhagen, 1980, reflect the concerns of the majority of women in the world. These themes put the question of women's oppression in its proper political, economic and social context, evaluating it in terms of the effects of economic exploitation, colonial and neo-colonial domination, and racism. Specific paragraphs of the

«Forward-looking Strategies» document deal with the problems of women in detention, refugee women and children, migrant women, women and children under apartheid, Palestinian women and children and a multitude of other specific problems.

What distinguished the Nairobi conference from the ones of Mexico City and Copenhagen, was that the pro-imperialist and reactionary forces were better organized this time. Led by the daughter of Reagan, they orchestrated a concerted campaign to «depoliticize» the conference, i.e. to have it abstain from dealing with women's oppression in a social and political context and thus avoid criticism of the policies of the US and its reactionary allies.



Overall this campaign did not succeed. Progressive delegations from socialist countries, developing countries and liberation movements persistently linked women's oppression with its deeper causes. There was much criticism of the US's aggressive policies, most recently affirmed in the Star Wars project, which is a real threat to women's

concern and need for peace. Many delegates stressed that women's advancement is retarded by the policies of reactionary dictatorships which have US government support. Heavy criticism was directed against the apartheid regime in South Africa and Zionism's depriving the Palestinian people of their rights.

On one point, the reactionary forces did score a formal victory. The conference delegates had decided that the final document should be ratified unanimously rather than by majority rule as at the previous conferences. Thus the US was able to exercise a veto over the entire document by insisting that the mention of Zionism be deleted from paragraph 95 which lists the obstacles to achieving equality, peace and development.

There was heated debate on this deletion with many progressive forces having voiced their condemnation of Zionism. Yet in the end, it was agreed to acquiesce on this point in order to attain unanimous approval of the document as a whole. The Zionists presented this as a big victory, but in fact it is only a formal one. The majority of delegates, like the peoples and progressive forces around the world, have condemned Zionism and will continue to do so, despite its being removed from this particular document.

Palestinian Women's Role at the Conference

As part of the UN World Conference on Women held in Nairobi, Kenya in July, women from all over the world gathered from July 10-19 for a pre-conference forum. Among those attending were women from national liberation movements and socialist countries. The UN estimated that 11-13,000 people participated in the week of non-official proceedings. «Democratic Palestine» interviewed one of the women from the Palestinian delegation.

What role did Palestinian women play in the pre-conference forum?

Our Palestinian delegation was concerned with issues dealing with Palestine, the question of national liberation movements and overall Arab issues. We attempted to attend as many workshops as possible and to demonstrate our presence. There were over 140 workshops a day and obviously we were not able to cover them all. In spite of the pressure from Zionist groups, it was interesting for us to find that the workshops were generally in favour of socialist countries and progressive forces as a whole. It was clear that the Zionists wanted to pose the question of peace merely as a personal issue with-

out dealing with the role of the state and the settler-colonial aspects of 'Israel'. Most people were fed up with the Zionist propaganda and we felt that we gained new supporters. In the workshops, many people spoke positively on the question of Palestine - from the human rights perspective, or about Israel's relationship to the South African apartheid regime, or from other perspectives; it was all connected together. The most well-attended workshops dealt with Palestine, the Arab world as a whole, Central America, Nicaragua and Southern Africa.

For our part, four Palestinian women who had been released in recent prisoner exchanges spoke in workshops, explaining their experiences as Palestinian women in prison