World Conference of the United Nations
Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace

The World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace took place at Copenhagen, Denmark, from 14 to 30 July 1980, and held 21 plenary meetings. Representatives of 145 Governments, five United Nations specialized agencies, 10 intergovernmental, organizations and several United Nations bodies and programmes participated. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the South West Africa People’s Organization, the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, both of South Africa, sent observers. (See Appendix III for list of State participants and officers.)

The Conference agenda covered four substantive areas: the effects of apartheid on women in southern Africa and special measures to assist them; a mid-point review and evaluation of progress in and obstacles to attaining the objectives of the Decade at the national, regional and international levels from 1975 to 1980, in keeping with the 1975 World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year; elaboration of the Programme of Action for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade for Women; and the effects of Israeli occupation on Palestinian women inside and outside the occupied territories, with emphasis on a review of their social and economic needs and special measures to assist them. Consideration of different aspects of each of these agenda items were assigned to the Conference’s two main committees—the First and Second Committees—while the other items on the agenda were discussed in plenary meetings. In addition, the Conference established a Committee of the Whole to consider Part One—the “Background and framework” section of the Programme of Action.

The Conference was opened by the United Nations Secretary-General, who stated that global problems were so interlocked that efforts for their solution must proceed simultaneously along several paths. Issues apparently specific to women could not be dissociated from the broader questions of development and peace. He said that the three goals of the Decade—equality, development and peace—were therefore also those of the United Nations itself.

Queen Margrethe II of Denmark made the inaugural address, expressing the hope that women all over the world would benefit from the Conference’s work. She also stressed that efforts for the advancement of women could not be pursued in a political vacuum but must be closely related to parallel international efforts to strengthen development and peace.

The President of the Conference said it was the Conference’s task to take action to improve the conditions of poverty under which millions of women were living. Efforts to establish a new international economic order should aim not only at redressing the balance between rich and poor countries but also at rectifying the inequalities between the sexes.

Preparations for the Conference

Preparatory meetings

Following upon preparatory meetings or seminars at which the role of women was considered and recommendations were adopted, held in the various regions during 1979 under the auspices of the regional commissions, a high-level meeting on the employment of women in countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was organized by OECD in Paris on 16 and 17 April 1980. In addition, the secretariat of the World Conference co-sponsored preparatory seminars: the Hemispheric Seminar on Women under Apartheid (Montreal, Canada, 9-11 May) and the International Seminar on Women and Apartheid (Helsinki, Finland, 19-21 May) (see p. 228)—both in cooperation with the Special Committee against Apartheid and the latter also with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)—and the Seminar on Women and the Media (New York, 20-25 May), also with UNESCO.

Pre-Conference consultations open to all States invited to take part in the Conference were held at Copenhagen on 13 July, under the...