

## Women and Peace

Under the title: "Women's Role in Peace Movements", the *Asian Woman* — the official publication of the Asian Women's Institute — has recently been running a series of articles dealing with the role that women from different nations around the world have been playing in peace movements. Some of the articles are based on case studies, done by women researchers, of women's participation in peace efforts within their own societies; others on reflections by women on the future of world peace and the role of women in that future.

In its introduction to the series, the *Asian Woman* emphasizes the public aspect of the women's peace activities around the world. When women, within their respective societies, experience problematic and threatening social situations, they defy the traditions that limit them to the narrow confines of their private lives and step out to participate in the public fields alongside the men.

Wars and violence, perhaps the most despicable phenomena of our human existence, have been the common enemies of all societies. While it is true that aggressiveness and the desire for power and expansion have been the chief causes of war, it is equally true that wars have also been caused by injustice and oppression imposed on the people by the ruling class. The claim for justice and freedom is at the root of many violent uprisings, especially in developing countries where the rulers ignore the modern significance of democracy and cling to the old-fashioned principle of rule "by divine right".

In what follows, I shall focus on five case studies of women's peace activities in five different countries: Sweden, Poland, Cuba, the Philippines, and South Africa.

In examining the role of black South African women in peace movements, Ms. Shirley Talbot<sup>(1)</sup> focuses "on black women's response to, and campaigns against, the pass laws", South African labor laws set up by the white ruling elites to control and exploit African labor. That Ms. Talbot emphasizes the struggle of black women against exploitation and apartheid reveals how closely linked the struggle for peace and the struggle for freedom and justice are.

The first organized resistance to apartheid by black South African women came in 1913, when, for the first time, the pass laws were being applied to women as well as men. In several towns women organized peaceful marches in which they expressed their refusal to carry the passes. Arrests and imprisonments followed. Prisons overflowed with women many of whom were brutally treated.

The next thirty or forty years of South African politics, Ms. Talbot continues, witnessed the birth of the African Nationalist Congress (ANC) which gave its full support to the causes of the black population and black women. In 1948 the ANC Women's League was officially inaugurated. This organization has dedicated its efforts to the general struggle of the African people for liberation ever since and particularly to the struggle of African women for freedom and equality.

In the Kalinga community of the Philippines, the women's struggle for peace has paralleled that of the South African women: a struggle for existence and for the preservation of their community and culture.<sup>(2)</sup>

Reviewing the historical role of Kalinga women in peace making efforts within their community, Victoria de la Cruz argues that the women's most serious role in conflict settlement emerges whenever "the social order is seriously threatened by outside forces". To illustrate her point, de la Cruz takes the incident of the Chico dams as example.

In 1976, a government plan to build two huge hydroelectric dams along the Chico river threatened the life of the people living on that river: it meant the dislocation of 800 families and the destruction of their main agricultural product — rice — on which their economic as well as their cultural life is built.

The uprising that followed involved the whole Kalinga community. But particularly active were women who participated in the dismantling of the tents put up by the soldiers guarding the dam site, and in petition signing. This involvement, in de la Cruz's opinion, has encouraged a more active role for women in community affairs and in conflict resolution and peace efforts.

In Cuba, Lic. Ana Maria Navarro Arrue argues that women have historically been "tenacious fighters" in the struggles for independence and social equality<sup>(3)</sup>. Today, despite the fact that the new socialist system provides equal rights for all Cuban citizens, Cuban women continue to struggle against the remnants of the old social order within their society as well as against all inequality and injustice in the world.

To attain their goals, Cuban women have had to organize and to work collectively. They have done this within the framework of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). Today, this federation boasts a membership of more than 81% of all

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Cuban women above the age of 14. It has direct links with the ruling party and works at both the political and social levels. It also hopes, through its links with women's organizations around the world to advance women's causes and promote better understanding between nations.

Like the Cuban woman, the historical image of the Polish woman has been that of a tough militant — a defender of her children, possessions and identity.<sup>(4)</sup>

As Ms. Maria Lunderius tells us, the successive wars experienced by Poland for many centuries have forced its women to "fight for freedom, national liberation, for the right to live in peace and for human rights." It is precisely because these women have suffered so much from the savagery of wars, and because they, as mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters experienced much misery, that today they fight so strongly for the cause of peace.

The post World War II era, as Lunderius tells us, has witnessed the emergence of several outstanding Polish women from all fields active in the peace movement. A group of women artists and novelists saw in literature and the arts "important measures for promoting peace." And in 1951 they succeeded in establishing an international award "for the most outstanding work of literature, painting, sculpture or film to propagate the cause of peace."

Polish women doctors, realizing, perhaps more than others, the value of human life have been protesting against the arms race and nuclear weapons. Others in the political and social fields have been promoting the idea of peace education. One important victory was the passage of a constitutional law banning military toys for children.

In Sweden, where no war has occurred for 150 years, women are very active in peace movements. They have been particularly active at the international level and in international organizations such as the Geneva Disarmament Committee (GDC). Alva Myrdal, the Swedish representative in the GDC from 1962 to 1972, has won the 1982 Nobel Peace Prize.

Internally, Swedish women have been calling for the reduction of Sweden's expenditure on weapons and defence. They have also been organizing rallies, marches, and conferences, protesting against the arms race and the deployment of nuclear weapons in Europe.

Today Swedish women are engaged in several debates concerning such issues as feminism and peace, the origins of militarism and its links to sex role divisions, and the importance of nuclear energy and its use for non-aggressive purposes.

Hearing and reading about women's activities around the world for the causes of peace and social justice, one cannot but wonder where the Arab woman comes in: what has she done and what is she doing today for those causes?

It could be that the Arab woman has not yet been able, despite the many challenges and threats her society faces, to break the traditional barriers and declare her position openly.

However, during the war years in Lebanon, the press reported on the Lebanese women's participation in peace efforts as well as on their social and first-aid activities. One example of this participation was the panel held on Feb. 14, 1982, at the Makassed School for Girls, sponsored by Mrs. Wajiha Wazzan, wife of Prime Minister Shafiq Wazzan. In their presentations, the participants condemned violence as a way of solving problems. All women, they said, should join their efforts to put an end to warfare and to restore a life of peace and love. One of the main topics discussed was prevention of violence in the family. One speaker suggested that instauration of social justice could effectively prevent violence. Also emphasized were the roles that family, schools and mass media play in preventing the development of violence in the child. The meeting ended with a call, urging all Lebanese mothers to join in a campaign for peace. Teams and groups were formed with the aim of spreading the idea through every sector of the city as well as through near and remote villages.

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1. Shirley Mashiane Talbot, "Women's Role in Peace Movements: South African Women", *Asian Woman*, Vol. VII, No. XXII, March 1982, p. 5.
2. Victoria de la Cruz, "Women's Role in Peace Movements: Participation of Kalinga Women", *Asian Woman*, Vol. VII, No. XXII, March 1982, p. 6.
3. Ana Maria Navarro Arrue, "Women's Role in Peace Movements: Contribution of Cuban Woman to Peace", *Asian Woman*, Vol. VII, No. XXIV, Spet. 1982, p. 8.
4. Maria Lunderius, "Woman's Role in Peace Movements: Attitudes of Polish & Scandinavian Women Towards Peace", *Asian Woman*, Vol. VII, No. XXIII, June 1982, p. 6.
5. *Ibid.*