
PROCLAIMING PACIFIC ISSUES IN NAIROBI

Diane Goodwillie

Malgré ses efforts soutenus au Forum '85, la petite délégation des femmes de la région du Pacifique a eu des difficultés à avoir un impact. Elles voulaient avant tout stresser la vulnérabilité que ressentent les femmes du Pacifique en raison de l'intervention continue des puissances étrangères dans leurs États, et à cause de leur désir d'établir des zones non-nucléaires. Bien que la délégation fut handicapée par son inexpérience et par les manipulations du gouvernement indonésien, elle a tout de même réussi à faire connaître certains soucis qu'elle a. Diane Goodwillie du Fiji fait un reportage de la présence des femmes du Pacifique à Nairobi, et des efforts faits pour rapporter leurs expériences à leurs peuples suite au Forum.

Cautioning against divisions and confrontations, Dame Nita Barrow opened the 1985 NGO Forum by saying: "Registration shows a large number of people are here from Africa and the Third World (60%). This puts a real responsibility on women of the Third World. Learn to stand tall, not to be aggressively different, but say, "I do not wish to exchange my world for a better world." Women from the South Pacific stood up and spoke out – but the approximately 60 Pacific Islanders (over three times the number that went to the 1980 Copenhagen meeting) found it difficult to make an impact on the estimated 14,000 who crowded the university campus for the NGO Forum.

Last minute regional non-government meetings had helped build pacific awareness of and interest in the Forum. In March 1985 a non-government and government Conference, jointly spon-



Susana Ounei from New Caledonia at the Peace Tent

Credit: Diane Goodwillie

sored by an NGO steering committee and the South Pacific Commission, had chosen four women to receive Canadian aid to attend the Forum; others were encouraged to seek their own funding. A Pacific Young Women's Meeting held in May and sponsored by the World YWCA focussed on such feminist issues as violence against women, nuclear free zones, independence, and the status and health of women. Tupou Vere from Fiji was asked to emphasize in Nairobi the vulnerability young Pacific women experience due to the continued intervention of foreign powers in the small Pacific states. Many of the women going to Nairobi stopped off in Sydney for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom's Peace Conference; there they boldly drafted twenty-four resolutions ranging from supporting migrant women to dismantling the Marcos dictatorship and supporting the People's Charter for a Nuclear Free Pacific.

Differing opinions arose during the daily Pacific strategy meetings, but in the end a Pacific statement incorporating resolutions from the above meetings was circulated to government representatives (especially those from Australia and New Zealand) attending the Nairobi Conference. Solidarity was given to those conducting workshops or trying to raise issues during the Forum, but inexperience often hampered their efforts. For example, it wasn't until after two workshops on east Timour and West Papua

that women realized the tricks and manipulation being played by members of the Indonesian Embassy. A protest was lodged with the NGO Forum Committee and in the newspaper, but it was really too late: the Indonesians had taken photos of all the speakers and many who attended the workshops. They arranged for Papuan women to testify that problems do not exist in the PNG border area of Irian Jaya, and it is likely that they tape-recorded everything spoken.

A bonus for Pacific issues was having Seona Martin, a University of the South Pacific Publications Officer and journalist from Fiji, as one of fifteen journalists working on the daily NGO newspaper. Usually these honours go to Australia or New Zealand! By the second last day of the Forum an afternoon seminar was arranged for the Peace Tent titled "Pacific Women Struggle for Peace and Self Determination." Over a hundred people learned about militarism in Palau, nuclear testing in French Polynesia, independence for New Caledonia, West Papua and East Timor – along with issues of economic imperialism, indigenous people's rights, migration and the environment. As Susana Evening from Fiji stated: "People at the Forum don't know where our tiny islands are. Even the *sulus* they are selling don't have the Pacific on their map, but by the year 2000 we women of the Pacific will be known and on everyone's maps." A start has been made, but there is a long road ahead.



Participant at Forum '85

Credit: Phyl Kohut Sereda

How can we report back to our country about this experience?" asked more than one woman in Nairobi. Fiji was probably the luckiest of South Pacific countries. Connie Chew was sponsored by the United Nations to attend the meeting and filed daily articles for her newspaper, the Fiji Sun and for the people of Fiji. Adi

Mei Kainona from the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation also attended; she was sponsored by the UN Fund for Population Activities. Since returning she has organized interviews and held open-line talk shows on different aspects of Nairobi.

Afu Sade, General Secretary of the Solomon Islands National Council of

Women, interviewed many participants and found herself under attack back home. She played an interview with Zimbabwe's Mrs. Mugabe, who spoke as a Catholic criticising her church for its stand on contraception and abortion. Said Afu: "Don't blame me, this woman said what she thinks. Write to her."

A project by Ofis Blong Ol Meri, a non-government regional women's service of the World YWCA, will hopefully help those who did not go to Nairobi learn more about it. Interviews by Pacific women attending the Forum were collected on tape, reproduced and given to ten country representatives who have promised to try to have them aired on their local radio stations. Also for Pacific women's groups, photocopies of relevant articles from the Forum newspaper and the Fiji Sun will be distributed throughout the Pacific. As Nita Barrow said in her opening remarks. "While consensus is not possible, understanding is. For women there is a lot to be done."

Diane Goodwillie works with the World YWCA in Nadi, Fiji.

MANUSHI

A JOURNAL ABOUT WOMEN IN SOCIETY



Manushi is an Indian publication brought out one month in English and one month in Hindi by a group of feminists.

The magazine is a non-profit venture, financed solely through subscriptions and donations from individuals. We do not accept grants from institutions, governmental or non-governmental.

For information about this magazine and subscription rates:

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