

and social systems, various forms of the family exist. Families, in their diverse forms, are entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support. Women continue to have primary responsibility for the provision of child care, health care, and nurturance of family members. The constructive role of families, and the role of women within families, for all sustainable settlements should be recognized and enhanced by all States.

Final Document, Paragraph 31:

The family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support. *In different cultural, political, and social systems, various forms of the family exist.* Marriage must be entered into with the free consent of the intending spouses, and husband and wife should be equal partners....

This was a particularly contentious paragraph as the right and fundamentalist groups pushed for a return to traditionally family values. The Holy See, Iran, and Algeria were among those lobbying in this way. The GROOTS language provides a compromise which broadens the definition of family allowing for inclusion of female-headed households, extended families, homosexual unions, and other family groupings.

GROOTS made various suggestions regarding the needs of homeless women and women who are refugees. These were combined in the following paragraph.

Final Document, Paragraph 119:

To improve the health and well-being of all people throughout their life-span, particularly people living in poverty. Governments at the appropriate levels, including local authorities, in partnership with other interested parties, should:

*Enhance community awareness of issues facing women living in poverty, homeless, migrants, refugees, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women, especially those issues related to physical and sexual abuse, and design appropriate community responses.*

In addition to the input into the two documents, we gained experience in the processes of a UN conference, and more importantly how lobbying can be done, and how local groups can participate in the international arena. In the lead up to Habitat II it became obvious that few Canadian grassroots groups, particularly women's groups, were involved in or even aware of the Habitat Conference. There was an opportunity to move into this vacuum and create some links between women on the Canadian delegation and women working at the community level.

Perhaps most meaningful were the connections made at the NGO Forum and at the Conference. Women from around the world were able to network and spend time with each other over the course of the two events. Connections which had been made in Beijing and at the PrepComm in New York were strengthened. Since women had been working together either in person or by fax, phone, or email, a sense of partnership and trust developed. Many people expressed the need for continued contact.

The success of GROOTS Toronto and the Women's Caucus should encourage NGOs and women's groups to become involved in UN processes. Although there is still debate as to the usefulness of the Habitat Agenda and many questions as to how to hold governments accountable to their commitments, the involvement of NGOs in UN conferences is one way to begin to change the UN structure itself and make it more directly accountable to civil society.

*GROOTS Toronto members include: Joyce Brown from Savard's (Women's Street*

*Survivor Project), Noemy Donan and Elizabeth Greaves from Dixon Hall, Gloria Gallant from Homes First Society, Bushra Junaid from the City of Toronto Housing Department, Sheila Miller from the Women's Services Network, Carol Mundle from Rooftops Canada, Maylanne Whittall from the Anglican Church of Canada, and Gail Yardey from Wellesley Hospital. For further information on GROOTS contact Joyce Brown at: 164 Munro Street, Toronto, ON, M4M 2B9, or by email at 104177.3101@compuserve.com*

*Joyce Brown works at Savard's (Women's Street Survivors Project) in Toronto. She has worked in women's shelters for the past two decades and carried out research in the area of women and homelessness. She is currently in the education program at OISE.*

## MARGITA GAILITIS

If

If I hold  
you, my son  
in my breath  
breathing for two,

if I solve  
you, my son  
in my mind  
thinking for two,

if I love  
you, my son  
enough for two,

if my heart  
stops son  
burdened by two,

will you breathe  
solve love  
enough for you?

*Margita Gailitis' poems have been published in both Latvian and in English in Jauna Gaita, Poetry Canada, Canadian Woman Studies, and Alpha Beat Soup. She is currently working on her first novel.*