

INFORMATION

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ADDRESS BY

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The designation of the year now ending, 1975, as International Women's Year by the United Nations, and the convening of the world-wide conference in this connection a few months ago in Mexico City, had a special significance in relation to a number of urgent world-wide issues, a significance which has not been adequately grasped by those endeavouring to weigh the import of the events. For the status of women in society has been found by international consensus to bear a direct relationship to the crucial issue of population growth. The unprecedented growth of population in turn, was recognized as crucial in connection with the problem of human environment. Not unnaturally, the size of the world's population is directly related also to the adequacy of the supply and distribution of food. Each of these problems has been the subject of an international conference convened by the United Nations.

Throughout the debates at these United Nations conferences, running through the discussions as a common thread, was the theme that problems of food production and distribution; and problems associated with the

environment, pose a threat to the very existence of the human race. It was conceded that these problems flowed directly or indirectly from the unprecedented increase in the size of the world population; and that the size of the world population bears a direct relationship to the status of women. While it was recognized that the low level of the status of women was not the sole factor igniting the explosion of population in vast areas of the world, it was generally conceded that where the status of women is higher, the risk inherent in uncontrolled population growth is lower.

It has been estimated that the world's population will double over the next generation and that in consequence, the most challenging years in the history of mankind may have to be faced during the three decades immediately ahead. There is no question that the explosive growth of population in vast areas of the world, constitutes an overwhelming new factor in human affairs.

At the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden in 1972, it was resolved that adequate policies and measures would have to be adopted wherever the national growth of population

presents problems in connection with the preservation of the environment. One of the principles agreed to at that conference was the need to encourage nations to adopt demographic policies, although these were not described as being intended to bring about limitation in size of populations. Unfortunately, because of the fears and suspicions of some countries concerning policies which might have as a goal the limiting of population, the principle of encouraging states to adopt population policies received international approval only when made subject to the reservation that such policies should be "consistent with national value systems." Presumably where the prevailing national value system conflicted with an enlightened demographic policy, it would be internationally acceptable for a state to follow an unenlightened and potentially reckless policy.

At the United Nations World Food Conference held in Rome, Italy in November 1974, quite naturally, particular attention was given to the existing problem of world hunger, a hunger which affects some 700 million people. In a world in which these numbers are living at or near starvation it might properly be stated that food is the century's most critical concern.

Yet there is an irony in this situation, for it is a fact that during the two decades following the last war, food production had actually been on the increase even in developing countries. The rate of production increased in developing countries at the same rate that it increased in developed countries. But there is one great difference between the developed and developing nations in this regard: the rate of consumption. In the developing countries there are now many more people to feed than heretofore.

Although the number of births may not be substantially changed in the areas of the world where population size is now a threat, the positive outcome of the great struggle waged by public health experts in the earlier years of the century is now being clearly reflected in survival rates. No longer do plagues and epidemics decimate populations. The survival of millions who would have perished but a few decades ago, has brought about a revolution in food demand. While the recent rate of increased demand for food was recently estimated to be 2.5% in developed nations, it was 3.5% in the developing countries. Yet in spite of one of the obvious reasons for such increased demand, the fact that there are now more and more mouths to feed, it was ironically at the World Food Conference that the subject of population growth

was absent from the agenda.

To discuss crucial world problems which plague mankind at the beginning of the last quarter of the 20th century without discussing the problem of population growth, would seem to be an exercise in futility. But equally futile is any discussion of world population growth without serious consideration of the status of women, for these two matters are inexorably bound together, the amelioration of one depending as it does on the improvement in the other. In fact it was for this reason that it was resolved at the World Food Conference that priority consideration of women be given in every stage of the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of development programs and projects.

There are those who argue that uncontrolled increase in population need pose no problem in a world which has learned through the use of modern technology and science, to raise the levels of living for all. The adherents of this view claim that the earth is capable of producing the means for a good life for all. The problem, they contend, is solely political and economic. They refer to the undeniable evidence of the relationship between a high standard of living on the one hand

and a levelling off of the rate of human reproduction on the other.

Many developing countries, particularly those countries in which the vast majority of the impoverished population is black, are of the opinion that the developed countries are now prepared to preach to them the need for control of population although no such control was self-imposed during their years of industrial development. They conclude that an appeal to the black races for population limitation at this time, therefore, is a thinly disguised attempt at nothing short of genocide. They see the future of the black race threatened by talk of population limitation.

It is difficult to persuade peoples who have little or no reason to put their trust in the spokesmen of those same powers which have for centuries exploited the resources of others almost exclusively for their own benefit, that the need for population control is a genuine crucial need in their own interest as well as in the interests of others. It is hard to convince them that the facts of life today dictate a need for control of human reproduction in a way which did not heretofore exist when plagues and epidemics were the means for achieving a balance in human population.

Yet the solution of the current crisis cannot be postponed until the day when the developing countries are persuaded of the sincerity of proposals for population limitation. Nor can it be delayed until we have achieved those social and economic levels throughout the world which in themselves may result in a lowered rate of human reproduction. Time is of the essence.

The debate which is being aired in international arenas, therefore, should not be an academic one as to whether population levels will automatically come into equitable balance along with the equalization of social and economic levels across the world; but rather what emergency measures are essential for human survival until that goal can be achieved. The goal of universal social and economic justice may be more attainable in the twenty-first century than it was in the twentieth, but it is unlikely of rapid achievement within the immediate decades which loom ahead of us at this time.

The natural environment in which the human has survived throughout the ages is now polluted, in some instances almost to a point of no return. Human persons numbering millions are suffering from lack of sustenance and

millions are surviving in a state of gross malnutrition. These situations have been exacerbated and brought to a point of crisis by virtue of continued large-scale human reproduction in a world where science has provided the means for survival. And it cannot be stated too frequently, human reproduction, unplanned and uncontrolled, is most common where the status of women is most depressed.

It is not easy to convey to a Canadian audience, living as we do in this land of relative affluence and enlightenment, the lowly status of hundreds of millions of women who are living not only in conditions of starvation suffered equally by their menfolk and their offspring, but in conditions of virtual serfdom and slavery. It is difficult to persuade the so-called enlightened nations such as we believe ourselves to be, that there are still places on this earth where women are mere beasts of burden. It is difficult to convince a literate people such as ours that almost two-thirds (468 million) of the total (784 million in 1970) illiterate population of this world are women.

It is hard to explain in a land like ours where the term equal status for women means equal rights before the law and equal opportunity in employment, that equality of status in these terms is virtually incomprehensible in vast stretches of this globe where women are viewed not as human persons but merely as instruments for the fulfilment of man's destiny through reproduction. Frequently, ironic though it may seem, the status of women is lowest in those very countries whose peoples have suffered discrimination and oppression because of race. It is as though the victim of one man's arrow were seeking some comfort by providing for himself a target for his own arrow, as though he too needed to have a victim of his own. For these countries are, of course, the countries still plagued by poverty, hunger and even starvation.

It is in these parts of the world that the women view themselves as having one primary function in life: motherhood. Although women in some developing countries make up a very considerable portion of the labour force particularly in agriculture, motherhood is still considered there to be women's primary

mission. And for so long as women accept this destiny to the complete exclusion of any other, then women will continue to produce large numbers of offspring.

What relevance does this have for a country like Canada? Here population growth is at or below the zero level; uncontrolled human reproduction poses no threat in this vast land. Food is abundantly available, although we do know something of malnutrition in some areas. While Canada is beginning to know industrial pollution, the comparative extent to which human population in Canada has affected the environment adversely is relatively small. Women in our land enjoy a status which is relatively high, though still seeking social justice through legislative reform and a change in outdated attitudes. Why then are we involved in International Women's Year?

We are involved for the same reason that we are involved in all forms of international development: we live in a world which now more than ever before in the history of mankind is one indivisible entity. We are involved not only because our traditions and beliefs dictate that we be concerned with others, but as a matter of practical self-interest. A polluted atmosphere does not stop at the Canadian border. The voices of crying millions cannot

be stilled as they float across the unobstructed air-waves of the world. And the fact of our affluence cannot be hidden from the wretched poverty-plagued starving millions in these days of immediate and visible communication. The threat which flows from poverty and the threat which flows from injustice in one corner of this earth is, as never before, a threat to us all.

Similarly if the lot of women is lowly in one part of the world; if women in vast areas of the world are illiterate and unlearned; if women in some parts of the world through their ignorance of alternatives continue to reproduce without knowledge of the consequences, then it is not just the women of this land who are thereby affected; it is all of us.

On moral grounds Canada bears a heavy burden of responsibility for others, a burden which little by little we are only now beginning to assume. We inhabit one of the richest and most luxurious areas of this globe. It is not through the sweat of our brow that we have available to us such a broad natural resource base. Although we may be developing and exploiting these resources, we had no hand in the making of them. But because of them, Canada is in a position to provide

assistance and leadership in the field of development. We also assume, perhaps incorrectly, that our contribution to leadership is particularly acceptable to the Third World by virtue of our history as a non-colonial power. But we ourselves must first recognize that development cannot be achieved if one-half of the population of the Third World, the population of women, is ignored in the design and implementation of general development projects.

At the World Population Conference it was conceded that the promotion of the status of women was an integral factor in the development process; and that socio-economic development would inevitably be curtailed without the active participation of women in all fields. Countries were asked to take the necessary steps to eliminate social practices which have the effect of discriminating on grounds of sex. In a resolution adopted by the conference, the United Nations and specialized agencies were asked to give special consideration to the impact of development efforts and programs on the improvement of the status of women.

One of the principles set out in a resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations five years ago in connection with the adoption of the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade, was the attainment of full

integration of women in the total development effort. This principle was reiterated subsequently in the General Assembly resolutions which proclaimed that International Women's Year should, among other things, be devoted to ensuring the full integration of women in development.

The United Nations Conference of the International Women's Year had as its objective three primary areas of interest, one of which was development. In a resolution adopted by that Conference it was recommended that the governments of all member states of the United Nations and organizations engaged in development programs, adopt a number of principles relating to the status of women. These included the recommendation that member states give sustained attention to initiatives which integrate women in the development process; that member states incorporate in their development plans and program documents, a specific statement as to how such plans and programs will affect women both as participants and as beneficiaries.

As recently as the middle of this month, November 1975, the General Assembly of the United Nations has before it a significant resolution endorsing the action proposed by the Mexico Conference. The Assembly resolution states that it is:

"convinced also that improvements in the situation of women ... are essential to the needs of development and to the solution of crucial world economic and social problems, as well as for reasons of equity, justice and fundamental human rights."

The resolution urges the financial cooperation institutions, including those providing bilateral funding:

"to accord high priority in their development assistance to projects that would promote the integration of women in the development and achievement of equality."

Clearly the international community has consistently been placing considerable emphasis on the interrelationship of the status of women and crucial world economic and social problems; in consequence emphasis has consistently been placed on the vital importance of incorporating in development programs the ingredient of women's concerns. These concerns, as enunciated internationally, hopefully were to be reflected at the level of national policy-making as well as incorporated in the national development programs.

Hitherto governments and international assistance programs had been designed with little consideration for the fact that, particularly in the Third World, women are producers. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, women provide

as much as 80% of the labour necessary for food production. But training, improved seeds and machines go most often to men. Women of the Third World spend between four to six hours daily grinding corn and fetching water. Yet projects designed to develop the means of reducing these burdens get little attention from the governments of both worlds: the ingredient of women's concerns has been absent.

In conformity with the principles which have been formulated with regard to the need to integrate women into development, a number of industrial countries either through statute or through administrative means, have incorporated appropriate elements in their own national programs. For example, the United States of America amended its Foreign Assistance legislation in such a way as to require that bilateral assistance programs:

"... be administered so as to give particular attention to those programs, projects and activities which tend to integrate women into the national economies of foreign countries, thus improving their status and assisting the total development effort." (Percy Amendment to the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1973.)

At the same time, they ensured that some

senior policy-making posts should be filled by competent women, so as to add credibility to this policy.

Admittedly, steps which have been taken by other developed countries in this regard may not yet be as meaningful in practice as they appear to be in theory. But they prompt the question as to what steps are being taken in Canada by those charged with the administration of our aid programs. The volume of economic aid which Canada has been allocating to developing countries has been growing very considerably, particularly in the last few years, putting this country close behind those which have already attained the target set for the developed nations by the United Nations. The actual amount of our assistance is fast approaching the billion dollar mark. It is a record of which we need not be ashamed; it is however a record with which we should not be unduly satisfied in the light of world needs.

In spite of the growing magnitude of the Canadian program, it is apparent that Canadian funds have not hitherto been allocated for projects which would have the effect of integrating women in development in a way which has been stressed so much during the last few

years in the international forum. In fact, the first major policy statement on this subject was made by the head of the Canadian delegation at the United Nations Conference of the International Women's Year only a few months ago. She informed the conference that:

"The Canadian International Development Agency which administers Canada's foreign aid program, has recently endorsed a principle of full integration and equality of women in development programs. In particular special programs designed to improve the condition of women in developing countries will be accorded a high priority in future Canadian CIDA programs."

This new policy would be more or less in conformity with the general principles which have been formulated internationally except that the principle of full integration of women should be a part of all social and economic development programs; special programs may be indicated in only some circumstances. The new Canadian policy is a most welcome one, belated though it may be.

It would be equally welcome to hear from CIDA that it was also adopting a new policy within the Agency itself with regard to the employment of women in decision-making positions. At the United Nations Conference of

the International Women's Year, member states were asked to ensure that women participate on an equitable basis with men on all levels of decision-making that govern the planning and implementation of development programs. At the present time in CIDA there is a dearth of women officers in the senior executive ranks. In fact, there is only a handful of women in medium-level management positions, the vast majority being employed below the rank of those responsible for the design and the implementation of policy.

If Canada's stance in the role of leadership is to be taken seriously, then it is not sufficient for our country to be seen merely as a donor of dollars. We must be capable of providing an image so that we may be able to exert some moral persuasion. In other words, we must practice what we preach; and what we preach presumably is a society in which social justice prevails, a society in which women share with men responsibilities at all levels. CIDA might well look to itself and adopt an enlightened employment policy within the Agency insofar as its women officers are concerned. There is no lack of capable women with the necessary competence to take their place along with their male

colleagues in the ranks of the senior decision-makers and policy formulators.

CIDA might also be well advised to examine the possibility of increasing the number of women appointed as field representatives who are posted abroad. It is in such positions that enlightened influence may be brought to bear, particularly in countries where the status of women leaves so much to be desired.

As a respected member of the international community, Canada must as a minimum adhere to principles adopted internationally. At best Canada could be in the forefront providing the necessary leadership, particularly in connection with the improvement of the status of women. For Canada, even among the industrial countries at this time, supports a policy which is generally considered to be enlightened in this regard.

The status of women in Canadian society is merely a measure of the status of all of our people. But the status of women in the total society of this our single world, may well be a measure of the status of human life itself on this earth. For if it is the status of women which affects the size of populations; if it

is true that where the status of women is low uncontrolled population growth is rampant, then the key to our future may well lie in raising that status. International Women's Year merely draws attention to this facet of the crucial problems facing our world. They are not problems for women alone to solve any more than they are problems for men alone to solve. They are problems for all of us to solve, together.

The world's business is Canada's business; and Canada's business is that of all our people, men and women alike. International Women's Year has been my business. It should also be yours.