

HISTORICAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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After the banning of the ANC and the SACP in the early 60's, although FEDSAW was not banned, the extensive repression led to the Federation not functioning.

With the development of regional women's structures in the early 80's - the old executive of the Federation met in 1985 and discussed the revival of the Federation. The initial concept of the Federation was to unite the regional women's organisations into a national body - namely FEDTRAW, NOW, UWCO etc. At the above mentioned regions were the only existent regional women's organisations. Ma Sisulu, Sister Bernard and Frances Baard, were given the task of travelling to all the regions to put this idea to them and to initiate the development of regional structures where they did not exist. i

All regions subsequently had discussion on the issue, and a national interim committee which initially included the old Federation executive members was set up. After much discussion it was felt that if we were to re-launch FEDSAW, it needed to embrace a much broader spectrum of women. namely - the churches, unions, Black Sash etc. In the light of the above decision, processes of consultation began with these organisations at a regional level. Each region had informal forums to discuss the issue.

At this stage both the National Interim Committee and the regional Forums, restricted their discussions to the constitution of FEDSAW, the unifying principles, affiliation, subscription and observer status. These discussions did not help us in building a working relationship with other organisations. Most of the organisations felt they had to consult their constituencies extensively before they made any decisions on these issues.

At a UDF NEC meeting at which Ma Sisulu was present, it was suggested that the women's sector within the UDF should form a national women's organisation. There were motivations for this suggestion. Firstly, it was important for the UDF women's organisations to have one cohesive national voice - to assert the position of women within the UDF. Secondly, we needed to have a cohesive voice to provide the political direction within this broad women's structure.

It was in the light of these motivations that in April 1986, the UDFWCO was launched in Cape Town. Ma Sisulu, and Ma Ngalo were elected the two co-ordinators, and each region was asked to forward two people for the council of UDFWCO. UDFWCO did not ultimately function.

There were a number of factors which contributed to this;

1. Lack of sufficient consultation

The formation of UDFWCO was not sufficiently consulted and this led to confusion and unhappiness around this formation.

2. The name UDFWCO created confusion since UDF was a front and not an organisation and could therefore not have a

women's section.

3. Repression

The Declaration of the State of Emergency and the restriction of Ma Sisulu made it extremely difficult for to pull the structure together. a

For the reasons mentioned above the UDFWCO did not neat or function. '

At one of the National Interim Committee meetings a decision was made to launch FEDSAW in June 1986. This launch was to be hosted by the Transvaal. At this stage the consultation process with other organisations were inadequate and the regions themselves were not strong enough.

Due to the above mentioned factors at the lahnching conference in June the Transvaal came with a proposal, requesting that this conference be transformed to a consultative conference. This proposal was supported by the W. Cape. Since other regions had come prepared to launch the federation, the decision was not that well received.

After this aborted launch, the interim committee met and agreed not to set any dates for the launch until we had gone through all the necessary processes and sufficient consultation with other organisation. It was also agreed that at this stage, regions needed to launch the process. This somehow created some confusion and Western Cape formal launched their region of FEDSAW .

It was agreed that each region had to create a forum with other organisations, but instead of discussing the launch of FEDSAW, it would be far more productive to work together around a common programme of action as unity can only be built through active working together. An example of such an initiative is WAR in the Transvaal. WAR - WOMEN AGAINST REPRESSION came together around the hunger strike and has since worked together on a number of issues. It includes women from approximately twenty organisations. We have managed to develop a fairly strong sense of unity in this formation and have therefore set the basis in the Transvaal for the national formation. Through the existence of FEDSAW within the W. Cape to which many of the organisations have observer status, they have also managed to build a strong sense of working together and unity with other organisations. Informal initiatives like this also exist in Natal and other regions. -

Due to the banning of the 17 organisations in 1988, - the national interim committee did not function effectively. This initiative was revived in May 1989, when the Transvaal hosted a National Workshop with 20 delegates from each region. The workshop agreed to hold a joint workshop with COSATU, a National Consultative Conference with a broad range of women's organisations and would set the basis for a National Launch. The workshop also discussed Malibongwe and the National Interim Committee was mandated to co-ordinate the Malibongwe Conference nationally. After the workshop the interim committee found

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itself extremely involved with the co-ordination of Malibongwe until January.

'At the Malibongwe Conference the issue of National Women's Unity was discussed and some recommendations arose out of the Conference. These are available in the Malibongwe Programme of Action.

After the Malibongwe Conference a letter was forwarded to us by the Head office of the UDF, requesting this joint workshop.

EVALUATION'

With some understanding of the historical background relating to this national initiative, it is important for us to briefly evaluate this initiative. We need to question why an initiative already taken in 1985 has up to this date not realised itself.

Firstly, the initiative was not the result of an organic development. When the old executive of the Federation initiated the idea, the regional women's structures were still relatively weak. When the concept of FEDSAW changed to include a much broader spectrum of women, it was important for us to consult extensively with all these other organisations and for them to consult extensively with their constituencies.

This is obviously a the-consuming process. Furthermore it involved a number of issues that we ourselves needed to have absolute clarity on. The issues centred around the form of the organisation, how broad the organisation should be, the structure etc. Our own unclarity around these issues created confusion even within the other structures.

The other factors which contributed to this delay, has been the extensive repression during that period. The State Emergency, detentions of the women involved banning of the organisations, made it extremely difficult for us to organise effectively.

It is in our hands now to learn from the mistakes, made, to clarify, exactly what we went from this initiative and to work hard to speed up the process towards setting up this national women' 3 formation.

It is particularly important for us now to unite women from all walks of life - committed to a non- racial democratic S. A.

If we as women do not speak with one unified voice at this point in our struggle, we will find ourselves in the position that many other women have found themselves in post- liberation. After 3 having struggled together with their men for liberation, women 31 still find themselves in a situation where the position of women Ehas not changed. It is only we as women who can ensure that we %do not find ourselves in the same position. We need to assert Zour position as women even more strongly now than ever before and :we cannot do that in small little divided voices, we can only do ?that effectively as one unified loud voice. We need to discuss Ethe constitutional guidelines and women' 3 rights, take affirmative action to ensure that we participate in all the negotiation processes such that the issue of women's liberation

and women's rights are firmly part of the programme for a new
S.A.