

BEIJING AGENDER

A twice monthly publication covering issues and activities related to the NGO Forum and the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China (August/September 1995)

ISSUE NO. 4 JUNE 1995

BREATHING LIFE INTO WOMEN'S EQUALITY

The Constitutional Assembly has given a shot in the arm to women's equality in South Africa. It looks as if the national machinery for advancing gender equality in South Africa will soon be in place.

Colleen Lowe-Morna reports on a workshop on effective gender structures convened by one of its theme committees early in June.

ACTION NOW

The workshop, held at the World Trade Centre, resolved that:

- that the report of the workshop be submitted to the Ad Hoc Committee for the Gender Commission and to Theme Committee 6.3 within three weeks
- that Theme Committee 6.3 of the Constitutional Assembly elaborate a plan and strategy discussion document for a package of National Machinery within one month
- that the government ratify the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) before 9 August which is South African Women's Day.

Participants want the Commission to be instituted this year. They also want this independent body to be entrenched in the final constitution along with a "package" of structures for promoting gender equality within government.

The workshop was attended by about 200 delegates from government, parliament and civil society.

EFFECTIVE COMMISSION: EFFECTIVE BUDGET

In a report soon to be released, a team of Commonwealth gender experts who took part in the workshop welcomed the resolutions

adopted by the conference. They said these "provide practical options for machinery for gender equality to be put in place."

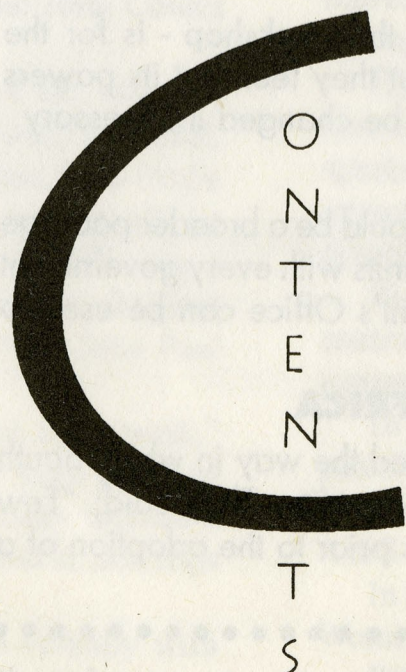
The team - from Australia, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Nigeria - said that "once a business plan is put forward and circulated, there should be no delay in implementing the machinery. **An adequate budget will obviously be necessary.**"

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Photo courtesy of Ruth Motau

What's stopping school girls from getting the education they need to get ahead? FIONA LLOYD highlights some of the physical and psychological factors which prevent South African girl children from reaching their full potential in the classroom. (Page 3)



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Too much education: poison to the brain! Fiona Lloyd asks "what's stopping the girl child?"

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EDITORIAL

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LEARNING FROM THE WORLD

The Commonwealth team didn't only write a report though. They were also there to give their South African sisters practical hints on how to use the gender machinery once we have it.

They stressed: the importance of political will; a clear gender policy; focal points in various structures of government; clear co-ordination of the gender structures; the usefulness of international instruments; and last but by no means least...the power of the women's vote to pressure governments into making relevant changes.

The team came from countries where there are no gender structures to those where there are an impressive array of mechanisms. They all stressed that "Rome was not built in a day".

PLANNING THE GENDER COMMISSION

The Constitutional Assembly can only consider whether or not the Commission should be entrenched in the final constitution.

But this committee has found it difficult to answer this question without knowing what the Commission will consist of, and what other structures it will relate to. People who attended the workshop had many questions to ask. Some of them were:

Should there be a Commission for Gender Equality?

Many women asked whether the Gender Commission should fall under the Human Rights Commission. Some people are worried that all "women's issues" would be dumped on the Gender Commission. In the end, the overwhelming view was that there needed to be a specific body outside government monitoring gender issues.

Should the Commission for Gender Equality be entrenched in the final Constitution? If so, how detailed should its powers and functions be?

Some people felt the Commission needs to be around for a long time to come. They also feel that legislation alone cannot redress gender inequalities.

Those arguing against point out that if gender concerns become part of the mainstream, a body like the Gender Commission should eventually work its way out of a job.


The middle course - favoured by participants at the workshop - is for the Commission to be entrenched in the Constitution. But they feel that its powers and functions should be left to legislation which can be changed if necessary.

What other national machinery should there be?

Most of the participants at the workshop felt there should be a broader package of gender structures. This will mean gender desks or units with every government department. A co-ordinating structure in the President's Office can be used to unite and co-ordinate the various structures.

TRAIL-BLAZING SOUTH AFRICA

In their report the Commonwealth mission commended the way in which South Africa is taking forward the struggle for women's equality. They said: "Few countries have an opportunity to debate these issues prior to the adoption of a Constitution."

 **Reduce. Reuse. Recycle.** Please recycle this newsletter. Pass it on to a friend!



It's twenty-one years since young people in Soweto took to the streets and staked a landmark in the long road to freedom in South Africa. Those young people are all grown up now. Many are part of that group of architects sculpting our new democracy.

June in South Africa has become synonymous with June 16 which is now celebrated as Youth Day. So this issue of **AGENDER** pays homage to the role of young women in South Africa today.

It looks at their needs but also at their achievements. It's too often these days that young women appear only as rape and teenage pregnancy statistics.

Fiona Lloyd takes a bird's eye view of the girl child in the world and in South Africa. The world's finally waking up to the oppression of the girl child and at long last, education projects especially for young girls are being set up. Let's not forget that this is where empowerment starts.

Lesanne Schwellnus of the Young Women's Network gave me a whistle-stop tour of an organisation that's making real strides for the women they represent. From a small project within a project, they now have representation everywhere it counts - from the Women's National Coalition to NEDLAC where the country's economic, labour and development policy is being shaped.

On another theme, Colleen Lowe-Morna reports on a workshop which gave quite a boost to women. The workshop - hosted by the Constitutional Assembly - set clear deadlines for the package of structures which South Africa is likely to establish for effective gender equality.

These include a Gender Commission as well as Gender desks in every government department. All this talk of Commissions and national machinery may put people right to sleep. But once these things are up and running, the world will be the woman's oyster....young and old.

Ferial Haffajee for the Editorial Team

THE GIRL CHILD

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"TOO MUCH EDUCATION: POISON TO THE BRAIN!"

Education of the girl-child will be one of the major issues at Beijing. In this article, FIONA LLOYD highlights some of the physical and psychological factors which prevent South African girl children from reaching their full potential in the classroom.

Thandeka was a bright eight year-old who dreaded going to school. Every morning the gang would wait for her on the corner. Unless she handed over daily "protection money" they would burn her hands with cigarettes or, worse, threaten to "get her" later.

GANGSTER INTIMIDATION

"I could tell nobody", recalls Thandeka, who is now a young activist in the South African women's movement, "I knew my father would kill these boys if he found out. Eventually, after a year, I plucked up enough courage to tell a woman neighbour. She started escorting me to and from school and the abuse stopped. Did it affect my performance in school? Of course. I was traumatised."

Thandeka's experience is by no means unique. Laura Joyce Kganyago and Else Strivens, co-organisers of a May workshop on "Girl-child Education", feel that gangster intimidation and "jackrolling" are increasing in South Africa's urban areas. And girls are not even safe when they reach their school, or institution. The workshop heard moving, personal accounts from 20 girls who were recently sexually abused at a Salvation Army home. "Sexual abuse is not addressed seriously by the police," says Kganyago. "Our daughters are being raped by relatives, teachers and gangs but nothing is being done."

Strivens is concerned that the problem is also inadequately reported in the media. She is outraged by the case of a six-year old whose rapist was released after his employer paid R1000 bail. "If that had happened to a white child, the media would have been up in arms," says Strivens. "Somehow, a young black girl is less newsworthy."

And what are South African women doing about this endemic abuse? Some, like the mothers of Diepkloof, have organised informal body-guard units to keep a watchful eye on school girls walking to and from home. Others have resorted to more violent methods. POWA (People Opposing Women Abuse) reports that, last year, a female vigilante force in Natal castrated the rapist of a young girl because they felt that it was the one way to ensure "justice".

PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURES

But South Africa's girl-children do not only face physical intimidation during their school careers. Psychological pressures

- which start in the home - can be just as damaging. Lenasia-based cultural activist, Roshnie Moonsammy, vividly remembers her grandmother's warning: "Too much education: poison to the brain!" When a girl's education is seen more in terms of future dowry than a potential career, notions of self-worth are bound to suffer. And culturally, boy-children are still more valued in many communities, not least because they carry the family name and the family's dreams.

CHALLENGING TEXTBOOK STEREOTYPES

How can such perceptions be challenged in the classroom? The Beijing draft Platform For Action highlights the need to "develop and adopt curricula, teaching materials and textbooks to improve the self-image, the lives and work opportunities of girls, particularly in areas where women have traditionally been under-represented, such as maths, science and technology."

It takes just a superficial survey of South African teaching materials to show that such changes are long overdue in local educational publishing. Primary school principal, Susheela Moonsammy feels that a "hidden curriculum" in South African schools, perpetuates existing gender divisions.

Nowhere is this clearer, she says, than in our textbooks, which show a one-sided view of male/female roles:

"Males are portrayed in a variety of occupations, whereas female occupations are confined to fantasy roles, such as witches and princesses, or traditional female roles (housewife,

mother, nurse). Illustrations favour males and pupils are referred to as "he".

TEACHERS: REINFORCING GENDER ROLES

According to Moonsammy, teachers themselves reinforce such gender stereotyping, particularly in the way they deliver rewards and punishments in the classroom. Thus, boys are seen as "unruly but intelligent" and are given more attention (even if it is in the form of punishment). Girls on the other hand, are rewarded for conforming behaviour and encouraged to be compliant. Such daily experiences "hardly constitute a climate in which confidence, self-esteem and personal worth are inspired" says Moonsammy.

Women's organisations are well aware of the often-quoted reasons for female absenteeism from school: household chores and financial constraints to name just two. But unless "hidden" forms of physical and psychological intimidation are named and debated, education will remain "poison to the brain" for many South African girl-children.

**Our daughters are
being raped
by relatives,
teachers
and gangs but
nothing is being
done."**



YOUNG WOMEN'S NETWORK

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FILLING THE GAP FOR YOUNG WOMEN

FERIAL HAFFAJEE reports on a project that's filling the gap for thousands of young women in South Africa.

The Young Women's Network has come of age. It started up only last year and has already made a political space for young women in South Africa with its unusual ways of organising.

An off-shoot of the Joint Enrichment Project, the network has formal and informal links with thousands of young women around the country. It was formed to fill a gap. "We noticed that young women did not stand or get elected onto senior positions in youth organisations. They also didn't speak up a lot in public meetings," says Lesanne Schwellnus who writes the Network's monthly newsletter.

FINDING THEIR VOICES

So the Network started out by running workshops with young women. They covered a number of topics. Rape and abuse of course, but also sessions on empowerment, career guidance and assertiveness training. The workshops are run either for individuals, at school or for existing women's groups. "We let the women decide what's most important for them," says Schwellnus.

The successes of their workshops are too numerous to write about here. But one of them really must be told. The women students at the Technikon Northern Transvaal were tired of not being allowed to speak at public meetings. They didn't have women reps

on the Students Representative Council, although they had very important campaigns they wanted to take up.

So they went to the Network. "We're not getting heard", they complained.

A few workshops later and the women students were speaking up and out. A little while later, they managed to successfully lobby the administration to get rapists expelled from the campus.

FINDING A JOB

Another pressing problem facing young women is unemployment. "Help us to find a job," was the most frequent letter that fell into the Network's post-box. So the young women who run the project put their heads together. They decided to start a jobs page in their newsletter and to begin a CV-bank. Now many employment agencies know where to find a ready store of young (mostly Black) women job-seekers.

But there's a bigger hurdle says Schwellnus. "Most companies are looking for experience and skills and there's nowhere for poor young women who are newly matriculated to get these." The Network is helping in a small way. It takes in a few interns every year to learn basic office, workshop and other skills. The intern project's proved itself over and over again with numerous beneficiaries finding good jobs in the market-place.

"But we're overstretched," says Schwellnus. She suggests that it's up to the government to assist with a bridging project for school-leavers.

MAKING THEIR MARK

The Network deals not only with the practical but with the political too. Together with its parent organization, the Joint Enrichment Project, they're lobbying for greater political space and clout for youth.

But it's a special place in the world they want for young women. "Young women don't necessarily fit into youth or women. They have specific problems which need to be dealt with and looked at," says Schwellnus, adding that "young women are most at risk of a range of social ills like rape, abuse and unwanted pregnancy". This may mean special sections for young women both on the forthcoming gender commission and on a youth desk.

Already the Network's pioneering work has been recognised. They're now officially represented on the Women's National Coalition. This has had the added advantage of giving the Network access to the National Economic, Development and Labour Advisory Committee or NEDLAC. Lesanne Schwellnus is the Coalition's alternate rep at NEDLAC and there's no underestimating how important this is. NEDLAC is the greenhouse of all South Africa's economic, labour and development policy.

These are not the only corridors of power the Network's been tramping through recently. They've also made two sets of representations to parliament.

"Towards a National Strategy for the Empowerment of Young Women"

April 26th to 29th the Young Women's Network National Workshop created a forum where young women from all nine regions could define their needs and strategise to take their issues forward.

Young women aged 16 to 30, explored specific challenges they face in relation to:

Violence • Sexuality and Health • Education and Leadership • Women and Work

Family and Household • Legal Issues

Immediate challenges are:

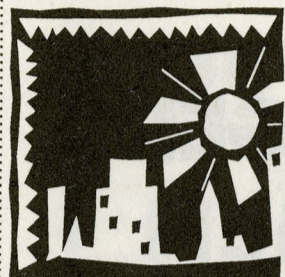
- To raise gender awareness amongst young-women and the community
- To educate young women about their rights
- To lobby for the rights of young women to control their own bodies
- To challenge all forms of violence against young women

For more information please contact the Young Women's Network at (011) 834-6865

Conference

BEIJING 1995

5



Huairou is where it's at!

After months during which NGOs around the world have frantically lobbied and petitioned the United Nations, the Chinese Government and their own governments to reject the Huairou site some 45km out of Beijing, the NGO Forum site controversy has drawn to an unhappy close. Agreements concluded in early June by Mr. Ismat Kitani, UN Under Secretary General, Supatra Masdit, the NGO Forum Convenor, and the Chinese Government pulled the following "concessions" from the latter:

- The NGO Forum **will** be in Huairou, but two additional "satellite" sites closer to the Government Conference will also be available - one being only for accredited NGOs who are lobbying the World Conference, ie. three sites in all,
- **All** registered participants (a total of 36 000) will be accepted to participate in the Forum and all will be granted visas,
- The buildings/meeting spaces for the Forum will be situated on a contiguous area of 42 hectares with sufficient meeting space for all 5 000 activity requests; accommodation for 16 000 will be made available; adequate communications facilities including simultaneous transmission of the government proceedings will be set up,
- Bus shuttles in and out of the city will operate on a 10-minute basis at peak hours and 1/2 hour intervals at non-peak hours.

A new visa specification, however, requires that each delegate produce a "certification of accommodation letter" approved by the China Organising Committee (COC) in order to apply for a visa, which means that even those individuals who have booked accommodation independently need to inform the COC of their accommodation plans. A classic case of one step forward, two steps back ??

3 COMMITMENTS TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

Following on Australia's proposal at the 38th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (March 1994) that Beijing be a "Conference of Commitments", countries are being invited to specify actions which they will undertake in their own countries to achieve change. In keeping with their own national priorities, governments should undertake to commit themselves to three or four goals in each critical area of concern of the Platform for Action. For example, a goal could be set to increasing literacy for women by 25% by the year 2000 or to having 35% of women in parliament by the year 2000.

Some 80 countries have apparently bought in to Australia's proposal, of which our very own South Africa. Provincial workshops are therefore underway during the month of June to begin discussing what 3 commitments women in South Africa want our Government to announce at the Beijing Conference. Discussions at the pre-Beijing National Conference on July 1-2 will also focus on the commitments and on post-Beijing implementation strategies. In this way, women all over the world hope to be able to end the "trail of broken promises" that they have become accustomed to seeing from their governments.

THE GIRL CHILD

In the second of a series of columns exploring the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action, Nomtuse Mbere discusses the latest addition to list: the girl child.

The "girl child" and "youth" emerged as special categories of women in the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies in 1985. In the run up to Beijing, young women and others have presented compelling evidence as to why the girl child and her holistic well being is of critical concern to all women.

Regional meetings in 1994 saw a new focus placed on youth groups, youth leaders and youth issues. Both UN and NGO bodies convened youth consultations. At the Third Preparatory Committee for Beijing in New York, in particular, young women were a powerful presence and played a major role in drafting the NGO comments on the draft Platform For Action.

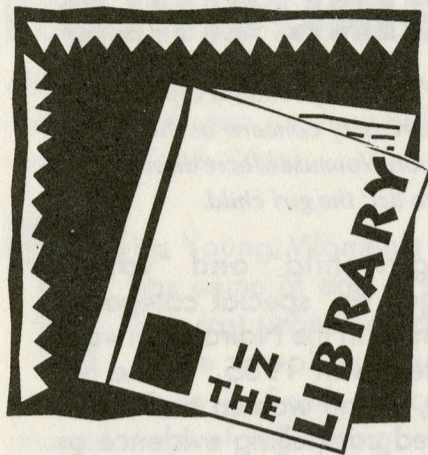
The culmination of young women and others' persuasive articulation about the need to highlight the girl child resulted in its addition to the now twelve point list of critical areas of concern. Most vocal in their support for its addition were regional groups from Africa and Asia Pacific. In fact, the Southern Africa Subregion had already designated the girl child as a critical area in its regional pre-Beijing Platform for Action.

Who is the girl child? A "child", according to the Children's Rights Convention is every human being below the age of eighteen. She or he has rights relating to their civil, political, social, economic, and cultural lives.

But for the girl child and for an African girl child in particular, these rights are hollow. All available indicators point to the fact that the African girl child is discriminated against from the moment of her inception. She receives less parental appreciation and care, has poor nutrition and unequal access to education.

But the **girl child of today is the woman of tomorrow**. And in view of the non controversial fact that women's roles are fundamental to the very existence and subsequent progress of society, the girl child's total upbringing and holistic education needs equal attention and commitment as that of the male child.

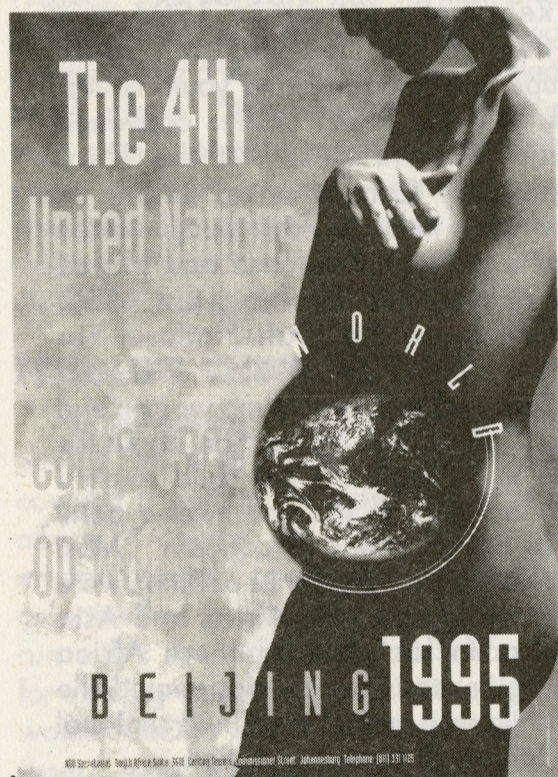
BOOKS AND LETTERS



The Voices of Youth for Beijing: Regional Youth Consultations for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

A Background Paper prepared by the Secretariat for the Fourth World Conference on Women Division for the Advancement of Women, Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, United Nations, New York. Number of pages: 40 Available from the NGO Secretariat for Beijing.

Girls: Challenging the World. A United Nations leaflet for secondary school students. Published by the United Nations Department of Public Information. Number of pages: 24. Photocopy available from the NGO Secretariat for Beijing.



DO YOU HAVE YOUR
COPY???

A5 posters are available free of charge. Please contact the NGO Secretariat for Beijing and they will arrange to get them to you.

So happy to hear of your launch. I am a black South African woman currently doing an internship at the international Human Rights Law Group in Washington, DC. I work within the Women in Law Project and do work pertaining to South Africa. I read the first and second issue of Agender. News from home is always gladly received, but news on South African women's issues is especially well received...

Clarissa Mack
Washington, DC

The European Union would like to thank you for sending us your newsletter and we will be glad to receive it until the end of October. We have found your newsletter to be quite interesting and would like to send you the attached document by the EU Vice President and Commissioner Flynn on the Fourth World Conference on Women... We wish you success.

Francois Dronnet
Pretoria

YOUNGER WOMEN IN POWER

Here are just a few of the young women making a difference in government...

Pregs Govender

MP in the office of the Minister Without Portfolio. One of the architects of the Women's Charter for Effective Equality and past co-ordinator of the Women's National Coalition.

Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi

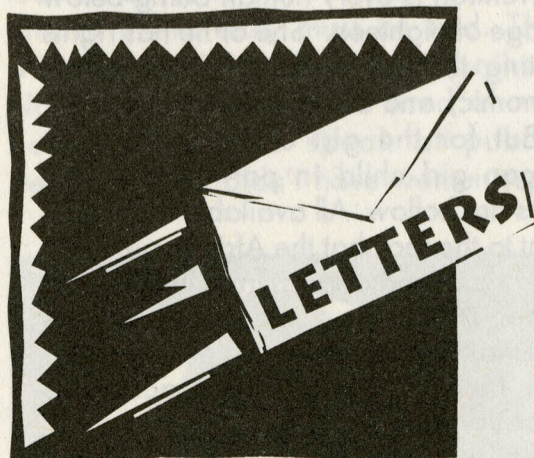
Deputy Minister of Population Development and Social Welfare. She will lead South Africa's governmental delegation to Beijing in September. Has radical ideas for the overhaul of South Africa's welfare system and its population development policy.

Lindiwe Zulu

The ANC's chief whip in the Gauteng legislature. An outspoken young woman who's made her mark both in the struggle for democracy and women's equality. During the election, she served as an official ANC spokesperson.

Tasneem Essop

The ANC's chief whip in the Western Cape. She's also shadow provincial minister of economic affairs.



INTERNATIONAL NEWS

7



VATICAN: MARY, MARY, QUITE CONTRARY

By Patralekha Chatterjee, Women's Feature Service

Karel Wotjyla, otherwise known as Pope John Paul II and the Vicar of Christ, started the year thinking about women.

On January 1, the World Day of Peace, the 75-year-old spiritual leader of the world's 950 million Catholics reflected in a public address at the Vatican on the role women are called to play as "teachers of peace."

The first Sunday of the following month, he announced he would begin a series of weekly public addresses on female figures who have distinguished themselves in the Church's history by promoting peace.

And his latest and longest encyclical, the 104-page *Gospel of Life* published in April, is a clarion call for "new feminism," free of "individualism, favouring the culture of life." The Virgin Mary is the role model.

One reason for so firmly outlining the papal vision of women is the Holy See's keenness to influence public debate in the run-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women this September. But since the UN population conference in Cairo last year, when pro-choice groups brick-batted the Holy See for its anti-abortion alliance with Islamic orthodoxies, the Vatican has learned to wage its propaganda war with greater finesse.

WOMEN: LEADING THE POPE'S BRIGADE

To start, it has employed a legion of savvy female personnel. Vatican delegations to regional conferences in preparation for Beijing have been carefully stacked with women.

At the European meeting in Vienna last fall, four of the five delegates were women. Asked how he felt being the only man in the team, delegation leader Bishop Paul Josef Cordes quipped, "It's easier being with women."

One woman who will probably be a part of the Vatican's armoury in Beijing is Lucianne Salle. With her smart red jacket, elegant coiffure, collection of conference badges from exotic locales and constantly ringing phone, Salle could easily be mistaken for a summit-hopping UN official. Salle was a psychologist and a Catholic activist in Paris before she gave up her job and moved to Rome. Working for Pope John Paul II, she says, has been good for her career.

"I get the same salary as a man doing the same work," Salle insists. And the perks of the job as a high-powered bureaucrat in the Pontifical Council for the Laity include a large, well-furnished office, travel around the world, and trips to UN conferences to spread the papal word.

Her work has also meant slogging it out verbally with feminists who don't see eye to eye with her boss on abortion and a myriad of other issues. Salle clearly enjoys the jousts.

Ask her how she feels about the Catholic Church's refusal to allow the ordination of women, Salle promptly says she would personally never fight to have a priest's job.

"It depends on what your goals are. Do you want to be known, to create an impact? If you do, a job as a priest is not the only way.

FIGHTING THE 'CULTURE OF DEATH'

The pope's representatives have also clearly realised the importance of fighting on different fronts, particularly on the abortion issue. After Cairo, it has remained a simmering debate in the months before Beijing.

The Vatican seems to be allowing Catholic NGOs, who wield enormous clout in many developing countries, to do most of the public fighting against what the pope calls the encroaching "culture of death."

Preparations are afoot for a meeting of over 50 Catholic NGOs in early June in the Vatican. At the meeting, the voluntary organisations will be drawing up a common strategy for the Beijing conference.

HOLY ALLIANCES

"More cooperation with Islamic nations" is also part of the Vatican's agenda, says Monsignor Peter Elliot of the Pontifical Council for the Family. "At Cairo, we read the conspiracy theories in the press."

"But speaking to Islamic diplomats, I found their reactions were like any concerned father or family person. They do not want intrusions of decadent Western values and they respect Pope John Paul's teachings. We can make common cause."

The Holy See continues to be quietly dogmatic on a range of other issues that will be prominent at the conference on women. Sample: The answer to the AIDS crises, Vatican representatives maintain is not safe sex but fidelity and monogamy.

Elliot rails against family planning organisations like the International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF) and speaks regularly of 'contraceptive imperialism' and the 'racist agendas' of western NGOs out to thwart the growth of developing countries.

But it is not only hardline feminists and those distributing contraceptives who beg to differ from the pope on certain matters.

In France, Monsignor Robert Coffy, who resigned his position as the Archbishop of Marseilles a month ago, backed the use of condoms if it stopped a person infected with the AIDS virus from "killing his neighbour."

In Britain, a group of Catholic nuns have set up the Catholic Women's Ordination Group to campaign for women as priests.

Whatever the Vatican says in Beijing, it cannot claim to be speaking as the voice of a unified community.



EVENTS

8

BEIJING AGENDER

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WFS
WOMEN'S
FEATURE
SERVICE

South African Women's Day! AUGUST 9TH

Women! Come out and celebrate!

Union Buildings, Pretoria

Entertainment, arts and crafts, food, etc. Stalls for hire

For information contact the Women's National Coalition at (011) 331 5958

Pre-Beijing Media Workshop

For journalists preparing to cover or participate in the Fourth UN World Conference on Women. Convened jointly by the **BEIJING AGENDER** Editorial Team and the Communications Theme.

Date: July 29, 1995

Venue: Institute for the
Advancement of
Journalism

For more details watch the next
edition of **AGENDER** or call
(011) 331 1125/6

NGO Provincial Workshops

NGO Workshops on Beijing will be held in the following provinces in the coming month.

Northern Transvaal

Dates: 8th, 22nd, and 29th of July
Contact: Albina Kekane at (015) 633 7116/7

Gauteng

Date: 22nd July
Contact: Kay Gouden at (011) 403 4647

Eastern Cape

Dates: 14th & 15th of July
Contact: Jean Murcott at (041) 564 430

The Employment Theme presents:

An Arts and Crafts Exhibition

When: 28 July 1995

Where: Kwazulu Natal

For more information call S'bongile Nene at (011) 403 7614
or Chana Majake at (031) 304 8893

IN OUR NEXT EDITION...

WOMEN AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- How DO women figure in the local government elections anyway?
- PLUS special feature: How to network in CYBERSPACE.

Simone Shall from SANGONeT tells you all you need to know to turn your computer into an inexhaustible source of information.