

Excerpts from a Statement by Margarita Papandreou: Head of the Delegation of Greece to the World Conference for the U.N. Decade for Women; Nairobi, July 16, 1985

In a small village near Delphi in Central Greece, a delegation of a women's organization was discussing the theme "Women and Work" with the local rural women. The question was: why do the male olive pickers receive a higher hourly rate of pay than women? One of the rural women responded that they climb up the trees and shake the branches. "Is that very difficult?" was the question. "No," was the response. "Is it dangerous?" "Not really," was the answer. "Do the men pick more olives than you per day?" "When they are shaking the trees," she responded, "we pick up the olives. Men who are pickers pick the same amount as we." "Then the olive grove owner gets the same amount of work out of men and women," a spokeswoman for the women's organization stated, "so you still haven't explained why you do not get the same pay."

Silence in the group while it struggled with the problem. Finally, the face of one woman lit up as she appeared to have come to an insightful conclusion. She raised her hand and said, "Because we are women." The answer was so right and so simple that it brought a plethora of nodding heads and murmurs of approval at the intelligence of the woman olive picker.

The answer was right because it represented centuries of cultural attitudes about the second-class status and the eco-

nomic exploitation of women all over the world. The reasons and causes for this are not so simple, and the solution, that is the raising of the status of women to that equal with men, is even more complex.

It was not until women themselves started addressing this problem and then organizing to combat sex discrimination, that pressure was brought to bear at the international level—the United Nations—for a special effort to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. These intensified efforts, as you know, resulted in the International Women's Year Conference held in Mexico City, in 1975, which launched the U.N. Decade for Women and adopted the World Plan of Action.

Despite progress achieved in many spheres during the Decade, we are far short of meeting our goals. The major obstacles encountered by many governments, as well as by many United Nations organizations, to the full attainment of the Decade goals as reflected in the Review and Appraisal documents, include the persistence of the discriminatory images and sexual stereotyping handed down by tradition, and the inadequate level of information about the contribution and roles women actually play in society, as producers of food, as providers of goods and services, as employees in the wage economy, as mainstays in the informal economy, while

also being the mothers of the next generation. And women remain largely outside the political process.

I would like to say this about my government in Greece. When it put together this delegation it chose women not as representing any agency or organization, but women who were known to be long time fighters for women's rights, for equality, development and peace. We were told to write our own report; there would be no bureaucratic interference or control or check-up, because *we* knew the issues, and we were the ones suffering the injustice of sex-discrimination, and therefore were best qualified to talk about it. This is consistent with the philosophy and ideology of our government—that decisions affecting the lives of people must be in the hands of the people, and fortunately our government does see women as people. In ancient Greece, you know, there was a long debate by men at a tribunal to try to decide whether women were human or animal. We won that decision by one vote! The decision at a high level resolved nothing—no attitudes were changed.

Our government also told us to comment freely and critically on the Decade, on the World Conferences, on the style of work, in an effort to be constructive, to reduce errors and to contribute to realistic strategies for the future.

We are convinced of the importance of the Review and Appraisal exercise—to assess what has happened during these ten years, and we are convinced of the importance of this Conference, providing we are deeply honest with ourselves, with our governments, with international bodies, and providing we develop a real understanding of the magnitude of our task. The goals of the Decade were, of course, unattainable in ten years. But did we realize *then* that to achieve these goals required a worldwide economic, social and cultural revolution?

This report will return to some of these more general questions. Right now it is my task—and my honor—to speak to you about what has happened in Greece these last ten years on women's issues. Historically our women have shown great strength and endurance in fighting for national liberation, in fighting against foreign invaders and against injustice. They have over-contributed in toil, sweat and tears to our national economy. They have reached fame in art, in literature, in music.

In 1952, they won the right to vote. In 1974, after the collapse of the seven-year dictatorship, a new Constitution was written which contained an article (4) stating that women and men have equal rights and responsibilities, and required

the revision or abolition of existing laws that violate this principle (act 116).

During the first half of the Decade 1975-80 some measures were taken to make this article of the Constitution a reality. A number of legislative measures were taken, particularly in the field of labour. The International Convention No. 100 of 1951, which refers to equal pay for both men and women for equal value work, was ratified in 1975. A 1975 national collective agreement provided for equalization of minimum daily wages for unskilled women and men workers within three years. The armed forces and police were opened up to women in 1979.

There was an accelerated move towards equality after the victory of P.A.S.O.K. in 1981, which formed the first socialist government in Greek history. Equality of the sexes was an important part of its programme for social reform. An all embracing effort towards equality and a network of new methods was put in effect during a four-year period. A start was made immediately, on finding specific solutions in sectors of society: the family, work, education, health and welfare, public life, the mass media and culture.

The reform of the Family Code in 1982, a historic landmark in statutory changes regarding the equality of the sexes, replaced the patriarchal family with the family of parental equality. The dowry system was abolished. Women retain their family surname after marriage. The contribution made by working women and housewives has been recognized and is taken into consideration in divorce arrangements. The social stigma attached to "illegitimate" children has been removed.

Serious and coordinated endeavours have been made in the labour sector to alter the position of women in production. Efforts are running into severe difficulties, however, as a result of the international economic crisis, which, because of the grave problem of unemployment, is slowing down the rate at which inequalities between the sexes can be removed.

During the period 1981-84, a law was passed abolishing inequalities in access to employment, in pay, in vocational guidance and in family allowances. The restrictions which discriminated against women farmers in agricultural cooperatives have been removed. A law for the facilitation of working parents has introduced "parental leave."

During the years 1983 and 1984 Greece ratified the International Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Convention

103 on the Protection of Motherhood, the International Conventions 111 and 122 and the European Social Charter. For the first time vocational guidance programmes for women over the age of twenty-five have been implemented, as have programmes to train women for traditionally "male" jobs. The Government has had great success in promoting a number of cooperative projects in agrotourism, handicrafts, poultry, wool dyeing, all run by women.

In education, radical changes in legislation and the school curricula have today made the equality of the sexes, as a new social value, a part of the network of general and vocational education in Greece. New text books conveying clearly the message of equality in both the text and the illustrations have been published for elementary school pupils. Compulsory school uniforms for girl school students has been abolished. Equality of the sexes, as a new social value, has also entered the Adult Education courses organized throughout the country.

In the sector of health and welfare, family planning was introduced by law in 1980 and in 1982, with the collaboration of the UNDP, implementation of a state family planning programme was begun, and seventeen family planning centres are now in operation. Information on methods of contraception is provided freely. Maternity leave in the private sector has been increased from twelve weeks to fourteen. Greek women farmers have been awarded pensions and other allowances. Automatic prosecution in cases of rape has been introduced, and the penalties have been raised. All uninsured women over the age of sixty-eight are now provided with state pensions. Four hundred and twenty new infant and preschool day care centres have been opened, and in rural areas child care centres remain open during the summer months to aid women farmers and farm family.

In public life the picture of Greece is not much different from most countries in the world. The number of women in decision-making centres, in the Government, in Parliament, in local government, and in the union movement, was and continues to be low. In the civil service, women, for all their qualifications, remain in the junior ranks of the seniority scale, and social prejudice has an adverse effect on their promotion in the civil service and their success in the free-lance professions.

Some break-throughs have been made. 1982 saw the appointment of the first women regional administrators and for the first time a woman became General Secretary of a Ministry.

In the mass media it remains clear that women's issues are not among the priorities either of the press or the television. Protests by women's organizations and state intervention have, however, limited the amount of advertising exploiting and demeaning women. The government has readied a bill for ratification in Parliament creating rules governing the manner in which women are presented in advertising.

My intention with this brief presentation has been to indicate what I believe to be the most important steps taken in my country to promote the equality of the sexes in Greek society, without this meaning that all the barriers have been broken down, or that solutions to all the problems have been found.

The Greek government is prepared, after the new four-year mandate won in the recent elections of June 2nd, [1985] to advance towards gradual resolution of the problems which Greek women continue to face, and which, in our view, are the following:

- unemployment among women is double that of men
- there remain actual differences in pay between men and women for the same work, despite the legislation which guarantees the right to equal pay for equal work
- lack of skills and occupational training among women
- lack of the social infrastructure necessary if women are to be able to share equally in the economic and social life of Greece
- allocation to women of the care of all the non-productive members of society
- illegal dismissals, with various excuses, of pregnant women
- continued exploitation of piece-work done by women in the home
- employment of women unpaid and without direct pension rights, in family businesses
- the increase in the portion of women in part-time work
- the need to ensure for women farmers the same labour rights as every working woman in Greece
- the small number of women in decision-making centres
- other social problems connected with equality: the legislation of abortion is the first priority here, along with the foundation of more family planning centres throughout the country

The magnitude and importance of this task and the need to make sure that equality of the sexes was given continuity and what might be called a political tradition, demanded that the Government programmes be responsibly monitored and promoted by an organization linked to decision-making centres. Thus, an advisory body to the Prime Minister was set up for the first time in Greece, in 1983. It is called the Council for Equality Between the Sexes and has nine members—seven

women and two men, and is chaired by the Advisor to the Prime Minister on matters relating to equality.

In Greece today, as you have understood, we are in the course of applying a specific policy for the social liberation of women. In conjunction with this, I am pleased to announce that just before our departure from Athens, the Government raised the status of the Council of Equality to that of a General Secretariat, a vaster and stronger organ for Equality in the government machinery. A new advance for women in Greece!!

At this point I would like to state several positions which we, as women in the progressive women's movement, and as women actively supporting the policies of the socialist government, give special importance to in the international arena:

In the case of Cyprus, I would like to express my government's appreciation for the report prepared by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees concerning refugee and displaced women. Of particular importance to my government is the case of displaced women in Cyprus. It is well known that approximately 200,000 Greek-Cypriots had to flee their homes in 1974, forced by the Turkish invasion and the subsequent occupation of the thirty-seven percent of their island, thus constituting a rare case of refugees in their own country. More than ten years later, they still wait for a chance to return to their ancestral homes.

As for the Palestinian women, we support special measures of assistance to them and recognize the right of the Palestinian people to a homeland. We consider that a basic precondition for the achievement of a peaceful settlement is the withdrawal of Israel from Arab territories it occupies since 1967. Together with the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, we support without reservation, the right of Israel to a secure existence within internationally recognized borders.

On the issue of women living under Apartheid, we condemn this inhuman system and urge that a concerted campaign be launched to isolate the regime internationally as a method for helping the black population of South Africa to gain its elementary human and political rights.

We are concerned about women in Central America. It is our firm conviction that the problems of the area cannot be solved by military means, but only through a political solution stemming from the region itself. We believe that the initiative undertaken by the Contadora group, if faithfully

implemented, would constitute a great step towards the settlement of the crisis in Central America, a crisis that affects women in many more ways than men.

My delegation would like to make a few brief comments about one of the famous—shall we call it “disturbances”—running through the pre-Conference meetings, and being discussed in women's organizations everywhere and by official organs of Governments connected with the Decade. The question of the so-called “politicization” of the Conference. We take the stand first of all that all issues at this Conference are political. To fight for equal pay for equal work—is that not political? To argue for the right of a woman to have control of her reproductive functions—is that not political? To push for the elimination of stereotypes about women in the mass media—is that not political?

Why is it that this Conference becomes “politicized” when we discuss the rights of refugee women to a homeland? or racist violence experienced by women in South Africa? Is that any more political than the items we mentioned above? Is it that the issues that are called women's issues are non-political and the issues that involve women—in conflict situations—are political?

We think there has been a misconception, a misuse of the word, or misunderstanding. The women's movement *is* a political movement. It is a social revolution. It is about changes in a society, about changes that are global. This means it addresses itself to all issues that affect the daily lives of women. This also means that no one group can determine what are women's issues and foreclose discussion on non-women issues as that group defines them. Where the problem lies is in what can be called international conflict areas ...when two nations are in a state of war or conflict, or when there is an internal movement against an oppressive government. It is true that these are broader issues handled in other bodies. But in those instances *that* conflict becomes the *key* issue for women; it takes first priority. In those areas where there is a fight for a homeland, a struggle against an oppressive racist regime, resistance against a foreign occupier, these struggles take precedence over the struggle for equal rights, although equal rights—human rights—are an intrinsic part of such struggles. Women living in such circumstances *need* to be heard. They are women in pain. And we have time at this Conference to hear them. If we listen to them, they will listen to us. And we will find mutual understanding.

We truly believe that the women at this Conference will make every effort for unanimity. If we cannot agree on everything—is all the work of the Decade lost? No. Some-

thing has happened during these ten years which is an essential pre-condition for organizing against sex-discrimination, repression and violence: *global consciousness-raising*. The Decade of Women was designed clearly to achieve this; it was an underlying unstated goal running throughout all decisions and actions. It put women on the agenda. It has brought to light information about women's lives; their burdens; their poverty; their toil; yes—and their hopes and visions.

We are surely at a higher global level of awareness today of women's inequality than we were in 1975—and this work *must go on*. We need international bodies, international activities. Women as a class are the poorest economically in the world. We need the subsidies that support international forums where our voices can be heard.

Concerning the implementation of the goals and objectives of the Decade, and of the Forward-Looking Strategies, we propose that during the period 1986 to the year 2000 monitoring and evaluation should be carried out at international, regional and sub-regional levels, based on national level monitoring. We give great importance to the continuation of the work of the Decade.

In line with our thoughts that women's issues should be given high priority and further programmes should be developed for their advancement, we believe that the Division for the Advancement of Women should be upgraded to a centre, with sufficient autonomy in order to continue its activities and effectively contribute to the integration of women in all spheres of life. Furthermore, we propose that the Commission on the Status of Women meet annually.

Our small but ancient and beautiful country has transfused Western civilization with its intellectual and cultural values. It lies at the crossroads of three continents and of many ancient and modern civilizations. The people of Greece are deeply peace-loving and proud, and our women have always taken an active part in mobilisation for the defense of peace and the national independence of our country.

The Socialist Government has adopted a multifaceted policy, for the promotion of Peace:

1. It has taken the initiative for a nuclear-free zone in Balkans;
2. It has fixed a *terminus ante quem* for the removal of foreign military bases, and has reviewed and cancelled a whole host of secret agreements and protocols relating to these foreign bases;
3. The government, under Prime Minister Andreas Papan-dreou, has been jointly responsible for organizing the five-

continent, six-leader initiative for the reversal of the nuclear arms race and the preservation of humanity. This initiative is still developing. It has been hailed by the peace movement in Greece and elsewhere, as one of the major hopes for world peace.

We, the delegation from Greece, would like to make a proposal that United Nations officials consider the possibility of subsidizing meetings of women from both sides in a conflict area, with other representatives from additional countries, each side choosing its own participants to sit together, without government or diplomatic advisers, and make recommendations for resolution of the conflict. Women are never at the negotiating table. Their contribution in this context may be apocalyptic and decisive. This is a serious proposal which brings women into the decision-making process—even if their proposals will have to be approved by their own governments and congressional or parliamentary bodies.

Today the world hangs in balance between war and peace. The important element is *mutual trust*—and the refusal to call one side's peace moves propagandistic and the other side's war-mongering. Castigating the other side or trying to lay the blame and responsibility on the other side is a poor basis for starting a dialogue. If we could have a no-fault divorce agreement here, that is, to agree to forget which side is guilty—then it would be easier to move to the practical arrangements for a nuclear freeze, or disarmament.

We, women, are a rising force in society, and we must find a way out of the circle of fire into which established male-dominated concepts and the exercise of power have led us. We must fill the ranks of the world wide mass Peace Movement, and we must, at the same time, struggle to move into the centres of decision-making where our voices, where our instincts for protecting life, where our concern for human rights, can become the dominant forces in affecting the future of the planet and the future of humanity.