

pērs·pec'tives

A seasonal newsletter of the
United Methodist Office for the United Nations

Ecumenical Women Defend Women's Rights at the United Nations

By VINA NADJIBULLA

Ecumenical women from across the globe gathered at the United Nations in March to urge governments to make good on their promises to ensure women's equality. Journeying from lands as diverse and distant as Kenya and Australia, they joined thousands of other activists to share their experiences of defending women's rights.

"To be present at the UN was thrilling, humbling and exhausting. To see women activists interacting and helping governments to face up to the reality of women's lives was encouraging" said Rosemary Wass, President of World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women.

Rosemary was one of 75 ecumenical women from 25 countries brought to UN Headquarters in New York by the Ecumenical Women's Coalition. Formed five years ago, the Coalition unites nine denominations and Christian organizations to work within faith traditions to raise the status of women and human rights at the UN and to promote dialogue between the UN and faith communities. By bringing these global delegates to the UN, the Ecumenical Women's Coalition provided a living demonstration that women's rights matter to people of faith, and that religious feminists are doing groundbreaking work to educate women, promote peace, and stop the spread of HIV/AIDS.

For two weeks the delegates joined 5,000 women's rights activists, high-ranking government officials from around the world to mark the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, a landmark plan of action for women's equality. The sheer numbers present at the meeting illustrated growing international concern about the status of women and progress made in achieving gender equality.

Held as part of the annual Commission on the Status of Women, the meeting was supposed to address the fact that ten years after the Beijing Women's Conference, in many areas women's equality is still not a reality. In too many parts of the world women are being denied their basic rights to vote, to be educated, and to live free from violence.

Women still account for 70% of the world's poor, and they own less than one percent of the world's wealth, according to *Progress of the World's Women*, a recent UN report. For many poor women, globalization has intensified existing inequalities and insecurities, often making them lose their livelihoods, labor rights, and the right to organize. Women remain un-

derrepresented in political and decision-making positions in parliaments, corporate boardrooms, and at peace negotiations.

The Ecumenical Women delegation began the two weeks by coming together in a full day orientation to understand how the UN works, share experiences of successful advocacy, and learn from each other about the realities of women in their countries. Many said their top priorities were coping with violence against women, including in times of war, the increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS among women, and a lack of sexual and reproductive health rights and services. The group agreed that empowering women was the most effective tool for development, poverty reduction and peace.

This day of preparation and sharing allowed the delegation to participate effectively at the Commission and not only engage in successful advocacy but also organize 6 public events during the two weeks. The public events were part of almost two hundred events organized by various groups during the meeting. Most of these events took place at the Church Center for the UN (located across the street from the UN and owned by the Women's Division of the United Methodist Church) and were the highlights for many of the delegates.

One of the main outcomes of the meeting was going to be a declaration reaffirming support for women's rights and the Beijing Platform. The United States administration initially refused to join other governments in reaffirming the Beijing Platform. Instead, it insisted on adding a clarification that the Platform should not guar-

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pērs·pec'tives (noun) *views or vistas* • **per.spec.tives** is the new

name of a publication produced by the United Methodist Office for the United Nations (UMOUN). It succeeds the *United Nations Digest*, published by the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries for the last 14 years • **per.spec.tives** will be a *tool for education and advocacy* for United Methodists implementing the church's official support of the United Nations and its related bodies "as the best instruments now in existence to achieve a world of justice and law." • **per.spec.tives** will be issued in *print and electronic formats*.

It will be available on the website of the two boards. It can also be sent in an all-text format via email • **per.spec.tives** will be a *seasonal newsletter*, with issues coming out for winter, spring, summer and fall. Each issue will explore a focus and will have an issue editor from among a list of contributors.



Vol. 16, Spring 2005

ISSUE FOCUS

Ecumenical
Women 2000
Coalition at the
Beijing+10
Meeting

THEME

Women,
Human Rights
and Religion

United Methodist
Office for the
United Nations

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Statement of the Ecumenical Women 2000 Coalition

Delivered at the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Ecumenical Women 2000 is a coalition of Christian denominations and ecumenical organizations at the United Nations focusing on the global intersections of religions, human rights and gender. As a delegation of seventy-five women of faith representing all regions of the world, we unequivocally support the Political Declaration unanimously adopted at the 49th Session of the CSW that reaffirms the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and calls for its full and effective implementation.

The Ecumenical Women 2000 coalition strongly supports the realization of the human rights goals of gender equality, development and peace which is the basis of the Beijing Platform. We affirm and encourage the continuing efforts to advance the human rights, dignity and status of all women around the globe, especially those who face discrimination in the inter-sectionality of gender with race, class, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation.

Our faith traditions have a shared commitment and history for social justice, peace-building, and respect for dignity of all people, the integrity of creation and fullness of life. An example of this commitment is our involvement in the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010), an initiative of the World Council of Churches that strives for unity and peace in a broken world.

Our churches, like many institutions, struggle with patriarchy and political processes that exclude and marginalize women. Furthermore, our churches have been slow to adequately respond to urgent issues such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, racism, environmental degradation and sexism among others. This underscores the churches' need to strengthen our own commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly.

Ten years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform, women and girls around the world continue to suffer much of the burden of war, poverty, all forms of violence and discrimination, and economic injustice. In the last ten years increased militarization, trafficking in persons, the rise of all forms of fundamentalisms, negative effects of globalization and neo-liberal economic policies have had a disproportionate harmful impact on women and girls.

Our faith traditions have a shared commitment and history for social justice, peace-building, and respect for dignity of all people, the integrity of creation and fullness of life.

Now, more than ever, we call on governments to:

1. Fully and effectively implement the Beijing Platform for Action;
2. Ensure full participation of women at all levels of decision-making;
3. Guarantee women's health care, sexual and reproductive rights and services
4. Dedicate sufficient resources to address poverty and unemployment, especially among young people
5. Reduce military expenditures, arms trade, investment for arms production and acquisition and reallocate resources to social and economic development, poverty alleviation, promotion of human security and the advancement of women.

Finally, we would like to stress that gender equality, protection of women's human rights and empowerment of women are essential in achieving the internationally agreed development goals contained in the Millennium Declaration. The Beijing Platform as a general framework and the Millennium Development Goals as a strategy offer hope and help us to move forward in empowering the most vulnerable women and girls in all regions. ■

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In late 2004, United Methodist UN Office organized a panel discussion with an Afghan human rights activist Malalai Joya. Emily Freeburg, a member of the Ecumenical Women 2000 Coalition, wrote the article below as a follow up to this panel.

Women Braving Peace

BY EMILY FREEBURG

Many brave women act boldly for peace every day; some even risk their lives. What follows is one woman's quest for peace in Afghanistan.

Malalai Joya, 26, of Afghanistan endures constant death threats and is protected by bodyguards. Why? Because the social worker and elected representative to Afghanistan's Loya Jirga – or Grand Council – dared to speak out against fundamentalist warlords who wanted to become leaders of the country.

In her December 2003 address to the Loya Jirga when the council was meeting to approve a new constitution, Joya said that the fundamentalists and criminals who waged Afghanistan's 26-year war should not be allowed to serve as leaders of the new democratic government; instead, she suggested they should be put on international trial for war crimes.

Joya was one of about 100 women out of more than 500 delegates serving on the Afghan Grand Council, and her speech was cut short by an uproar from those who disagreed with her. Because she refused to apologize, she was called infidel and prostitute, and her house was attacked. In order to continue as

a representative to the Loya Jirga, she was placed under United Nations protection.

Seeking solidarity

Joya, in her youth and stature, is unimposing, but her story is powerful. While she told her story with the help of a translator, several realizations came to me in what I can only describe as waves of enlightenment:

- I had never met a woman so culturally different than me before;
- everything I've heard about her country is probably a lie; and
- there are so many other women in the world like her that I know nothing about.

When I hear the urgency in the voices of these brave women seeking peace and women's rights in their countries, I wonder what I can do to support their important work. It never seems enough to just be educated by them and then to spread my new awareness to others. But that is, at least, a start.

Joya told us that current U.S. foreign

policy in Afghanistan is contributing to a potentially explosive civil war, and that, because of warlords and corruption, not even one-fourth of the aid money flowing into Afghanistan reaches the people it is intended for. When I asked her if she was planning to meet with anyone in the U.S. government while in the U.S., she simply said "no."

Since she spoke out against the fundamentalists last year, she has been invited to visit human rights and women's groups around the world. She declined for months, not wanting to be perceived as a spokeswoman for Western beliefs, giving her enemies more ammunition to use against her. However, at the invitation of Eve Ensler, author of the "Vagina Monologues," Joya finally decided to come to the U.S. because, she said, Ensler went to Afghanistan when the women there were still forgotten. Since Ensler visited Afghanistan, she has launched V-Day, a worldwide movement to stop violence against women and girls.

Desperate conditions

Just to survive in Afghanistan is a daily act of bravery as the conditions are so desperate.

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Interview with a Peace and Human Rights Activist from Mindanao Philippines

BY VINA NADJIBULLA

The United Methodist Office for the United Nations supported the attendance of Zaynab Ampatuan—an extraordinary woman from Mindanao, Philippines—to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at the United Nations. Mindanao, the Philippines' large southern island is home to the Philippines' Moro/Muslim population and is strategically located across the Sulu Sea from Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population. Due to its vast natural resources and off-shore oil, the island has attracted the interest of national and international powers.

Zaynab is the National Deputy Secretary General of United Voice of the Moro Peoples' Party, a progressive party-list formed in 2002 to unite the 13 Moro linguistic tribes and obtain the support of non-Muslims in order to

advance Moro People's quest for self-determination in Philippines Congress. She is also the Spokesperson for the League of Moro Youth a national group organizing Muslim Youth towards genuine self-determination of the Moro People. Zaynab is a Muslim from the Maguindanaon tribe, and was a delegate to the Interfaith Listening Program of the Presbyterian Church, USA in 2004. She is also a convener of Initiatives for Peace in Mindanao.

Perspectives: At such a young age you are organizing and leading a number of groups in your community, how did you become involved in your current work?

Zainab Ampatuan: I was elected the president of the student body of the University of Southern Mindanao—which was organized to respond to different needs of the student

community. The student body worked ecumenically and included people from many protestant denominations and catholic groups. After graduating, I decided to be a full time organizer. I realized the need to educate the youth and women in my community to be involved in policy and decision-making that affected their daily lives. I also come from a family that is involved in activism and has been a victim of the Philippines' government policies against the Moro People. In 2000 many Moro communities were bombed in an all-out campaign by the government. More than 500,000 people were displaced. The League of Moro Youth (for which I am the spokesperson) was initiated to respond to this governmental action.

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The Woman Who Anoints Jesus: Women at the Table 2005

BY KATHLEEN STONE

Mark 14:3-11 (Also John 12:1-11, Matthew 26: 6-13, Luke 7: 36-50)

*She is that sort of woman
So annoying
Not content
To let the shadows be
Not content to let the truth stay hidden
Dis-covering
Is her forte,
Revealing the masks
That others choose,
Reminding those who dwell near the holy
Fire will find them
Shadows will take form*

-Jan Richardson, *Sacred Journeys*, p. 82

There are few biblical stories that have made it into all four gospels. But, the startling story where something dramatic happens in a room full of men between a woman with a jar of expensive ointment and Jesus is one of them. In all four gospels, the drama erupts around a great showing of emotion and affection from the woman towards Jesus. All four say that there is a conflict between the men surrounding Jesus and this woman. And in all four the men seem to unqualifiedly think that Jesus would/should be on their side. Yet, Jesus in no uncertain terms unexpectedly affirms the woman. A critique of the disciples' judgment as a judgment without understanding is implied in his response. In the Gospel of John, the author even judges the intention of the protagonist (now named as Judas) as rooted in devious thievery.

STUDY:

Read Mark's gospel account (Mark: 14: 3-11). Mark is said to be the earliest written of the four gospels.

In Mark's Gospel this woman is the ONLY affirmed follower of Jesus. Most of the other characters are described as blasphemers and hypocrites of little faith and understanding.

Allow yourselves to think through this. Why and how could this story have survived as a story of THE exemplary disciple?

Go ahead and read the other three gospels. (John 12:1-11, Matthew 26: 6-13, Luke 7: 36-50).

The following is an attempt to outline the differences between the four Gospels' renditions.

All four Gospels seem to "name" the woman differently:

- In Matthew and Mark she is an "unnamed woman."
- In Luke, the woman is named "a woman who was a sinner."
- In John, the woman with the alabaster jar is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

In Mark's Gospel this woman is the ONLY affirmed follower of Jesus. Most of the other characters are described as blasphemers and hypocrites of little faith and understanding.

Let yourself think through such namings. Are there enough similarities in the four Gospels that this could be the same story, interpreted by the authors in three/four different ways? If these are three/four different interpretations of the same dramatic moment in Jesus' life, how do you view such differences in naming?

The reason for the woman's effusive gesture varies in all four Gospels:

- Matthew and Mark are very similar – Both take place at a leper named Simon's home, two days before the Passover, very near Jesus' death. The anointing of Jesus' head seems to be a highly intuitive understanding in which the woman's actions are seen by Jesus to be an anointing for his burial.
- The Lukan version is quite different. Jesus is invited to eat at the home of a Pharisee. A woman with an alabaster jar comes into the home and pours precious perfume on Jesus. But, the anoint-

ing is of the feet. The woman has now been named "a sinner." And, it is early in the Gospel and is a lesson in gratitude for forgiveness.

- In John, the two traditions seem to come together. The story occurs six days before the Passover. It follows the raising of Lazarus. We are sitting in Mary and Martha's House and Lazarus is with them. Perhaps out of great gratitude for the way Jesus has just worked in their lives, Mary anoints Jesus' feet. Some biblical scholars actually believe that this experience in which Mary anoints Jesus' feet is a precursor to John's last supper account and the washing of the feet of the disciples (remember: this Last Supper washing of the feet ONLY happens in John).

What do you hear in these three or four different contexts for the story? Let yourself imagine each one. Let yourself be the woman. What do you experience as you imagine yourself into these actions and responses?

In the four different accounts, men challenge the woman's actions. But the men vary in who they are and the intensity of their reactions.

- The men in Matthew and Mark are the disciples; they grumble because the ointment is so expensive and it should be used for "the poor." Judas betrays Jesus in the following paragraph.
- The criticizer in Luke is a Pharisee named Simon and he grumbles because Jesus is touching a sinner.
- And the protagonist in John is Judas Iscariot who uses the same argument as Matthew and Mark but there's another sentence added clarifying that Judas is not really upset because the money wasn't being given to the poor but because he's in charge of the disciples' money box and a thief. He immediately goes out the door to betray Jesus.

All of the men seemed to have good intentions, why did Jesus chastise them?

Why do you think Jesus validated the woman's actions?

In your experience, is the woman's act towards Jesus, gender specific? Why or why not?

What do Jesus' affirmations say to Christians about this woman's place in the social, po-

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litical and religious understanding of men? What do you think he would say about their place in the "polis" – the organization of the people – and the importance of their voice and actions at the table of understanding?

Though this is not scriptural, many throughout tradition have named the unnamed woman Mary Magdalene, whom tradition has named a prostitute and "a sinner." Yet, the only time that Mary Magdalene's past is talked about is in Luke 8:2 which says that Jesus excised 7 demons from her body. Mary Magdalene, most of the time, is affirmed and loved by Jesus and she becomes the first to see the resurrected Jesus in the Gospel of John. Mary Magdalene is never named in this story. Nor, is the sinner in the Lukan rendition of the woman with the alabaster jar determined to be a prostitute.

What does such a messy renaming in such a story say to us as women?

As we seek a place at the table of political, religious, social powers, what in this story mirrors our experience? ■

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Joya, a deeply religious person from a poor family, cannot afford to think that she cannot make a difference to the women of Afghanistan. She works with local Islamic religious leaders because that is the only way to reach people in her community.

Whenever she speaks, Joya talks about the importance of solidarity. She thanks feminists and human rights defenders from around the world; and she credits specifically Women for Women International and Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). But I find our responsibility – our part of the solidarity as U.S. women – more difficult to grasp since our country seems so much a part of the problem.

"Solidarity for Afghan women is to recognize that people like Malalai Joya exist and that you do not have to import leaders into the country," said Vina Nadjibulla, a UN representative of United Methodist Church who is also from Afghanistan. "Solidarity is understanding that local leadership arises even in the worst situations. Solidarity is supporting (Joya's) work without taking it over."

The real work of building peace

It is difficult in the U.S. to stand in solidarity or witness to the world's suffering when we are confronted with so many mixed messages. When the U.S. invaded Afghanistan after in October 2001, many in women's movements were confused and even misled by the claim that our country was liberating Afghan women. Nadjibulla suggested American women should challenge U.S. foreign policy when it uses women as an excuse for military intervention.

Joya renews my hope, but her story and other stories like hers are disheartening because we often do not know the reality of how our government actions are ignoring – or even harming – women in other countries. None of the stories of the peacemakers I have met are finished. After surviving the horrors of war, most of them are just beginning the real work of rebuilding their communities. For us to stand in solidarity, we must ask them directly what their needs are, and then we must spread the word by telling others, including our government. Only then can we tell others about them, and find ways to begin building peace together. ■

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What is happening now five years later? Has there been a change in the governmental policy?

The government is still targeting activists and leaders who are daring to speak truth to power. The majority of the Pilipino population needs to be educated about the situation of the Moro people. So information sharing is important and often targeted by the government. Philippines has three major Islands (Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao) and has three major groups of people the Indigenous group, the Islamized group and the Christianized group that are usually used by the Philippine government to fight against each other. This divide and rule tactic (fighting against each other instead of uniting) has been imposed by the Spaniards to peoples in the Philippines. But even without Spaniards, Japanese and American's direct intervention in the country the violence is continuing and being sponsored/sustained by the official government. Of course this situation became more complicated because of the U.S. and Philippines' governments campaign against terrorism. The continued economic exploi-

tation of the natural resources and peoples in the Mindanao region by the Philippines' government has been furthered under the false excuse of "the fights against terrorism".

How is your party the United Voices of the Muslim People responding to this situation?

The party has three primary objectives: 1. to be elected into the congress of Philippines to expose anti-Moro policies. Right now all of the people who are supposedly representing the Moro people are "traditional politicians" and do not bring the concerns of the Moro people. 2. to stop any governmental policies that will be discriminatory and damaging to the Moro community and 3. to enact bills that will serve the interests of the people. The overarching objective of the party is to make links across groups and to unite the three major groups within the country. Different from other Moro groups we don't call for an independent Mindanao but rather feel that only through cooperation can we achieve development and peace for all of our peoples. Our party is very vocal in raising concerns about the US military intervention, Islamophobia and large-scale mining and agribusiness expansion in Mindanao.

What insights are you taking back to the Philippines from this meeting?

I have a better understanding of how to use international law and standards to protect my people and their rights at the national level. Also a further realization that the UN agencies often times approach and collaborate with national governments while working at a country level. What is forgotten is that for the indigenous peoples most of their issues are exacerbated if not created by those same national governments.

I have also experienced the UN as a great venue to link with other groups who are working on similar issues and exchange information with them. I am learning a lot of histories and noticing how so many of our struggles are interconnected. Especially when you realize that at the heart of our struggles are militarized globalization and development through militarization.

If given the chance to speak to the US government officials what would be your message?

The US government should ensure that its current campaign on global terrorism does

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THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH AND WOMEN

Social Principles Paragraph 162 III. F

Rights of Women — We affirm that women and men to be equal in every aspect of their common life. We therefore urge that every effort be made to eliminate sex-role stereotypes in activity and portrayal of family life and in all aspects of voluntary and compensatory participation in the Church and society. We affirm the right of women to equal treatment in employment, responsibility, promotion, and compensation. We affirm the importance of women in decision-making positions at all levels of the church and society and urge such bodies to guarantee their presence through policies of employment and recruitment. We support affirmative action as one method of addressing the inequalities and discriminatory practices within the Church and society. We urge employers of persons in dual career families, both in the Church and society, to apply proper consideration of both parties when relocation is considered. We affirm the right of women to live free from violence and abuse and urge governments to enact policies that protect women against all forms of violence and discrimination in any sector of society.

The Status of Women, Resolution 191, The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church Part III

Across the nations of the world, new movements are growing that address the serious handicaps and harsh realities of the lives of many women. In the context of this increasing momentum for a more just society, we call on local congregations and the agencies of the church:

1. To exert leadership in working, wherever possible, for legal recognition of equal rights for women. In the United States, this means a strengthened determination to secure passage for the Equal Rights Amendment, in line with the United Methodist Conference affirmations of 1972 and 1976. We need to recognize that this measure has become a symbol of the drive for equality. It has meaning far beyond the borders of one nation in the search for equal rights in other societies;
2. To urge governments to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which was adopted by the United Nations in December 1979;
3. To encourage support of studies by scientific and governmental bodies of the economic contributions made by women outside the formal economic sector, and to include this information in the gross national product of nations or compilations of national wealth;
4. To urge governments to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in June 1998, which specifically addresses gender-based crimes and crimes against humanity such as rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and enforced sterilization;
5. To support the need to enact specific legislation and develop policies to strengthen women's executive and professional abilities, in particular to allow them to manage their own businesses. To this end, governments should develop policies and projects that use local, national and international networks to facilitate information, technology, credit and training for women entrepreneurs, as well as programs that aim to enhance women's education;
6. To examine governmental policies and practices, including development assistance, as to their impact on women's lives; to work to ensure that policies upgrade the status of women and that women are included in decision-making regarding development goals and programs. The key roles of women as workers and consumers and as transmitters of culture must be given adequate weights in national development activities;
7. To examine the impact of transnational corporations on women's lives, and to work to eradicate exploitative practices where identified. One such area is the promotion and selling of inappropriate products and technologies.
8. To encourage steps that promote legal literacy by publicizing and disseminating information on laws relating to the equal rights of men and women;
9. To encourage private charitable organizations, including churches, to initiate and support more programs of leadership education for women and other educational programs that upgrade the status of women; In many parts of the world, illiteracy remains high among adult women because of the lack of access to education in childhood. Strategies to combat female illiteracy must focus on ensuring girls' equal access to, and completion of, basic education. In addition, there is a need to reach out to adult women through massive literacy campaigns using all modern means available.
10. To monitor printed and audio/visual media and other means of communication on their portrayals of the roles and nature of women and men, and to seek ways to eradicate narrow stereotypes that limit the possibilities of useful contributions by both sexes. The church should encourage study of the impact of Western-particularly U.S.-television, radio, and other media on cultural patterns and national development around the world, and it should draw public attention to cases where such influence is destructive to other cultures;
11. To support programs providing knowledge of the access to resources in the area of family planning and contraception, including that which is Christian based, to encourage abstinence outside of marriage as a method of birth control, and to involve women in the preparation and distribution of these resources. Attention should particularly be given to ensuring safe, legal, and non-coercive contraception; well-informed choice regarding abortion and its alternatives (adoptions and so forth); informed consent for sterilization procedures; and safe women's health-care facilities. We also oppose profit-making referral agencies, which charge fees for providing information freely available elsewhere; and
12. To examine the impact of judicial decisions at all levels upon the daily lives of women in such areas as child custody, employment, civil rights, racial and sexual discrimination, credit practices, estate settlements, reproduction and education, and socioeconomic status.

AMENDED AND READOPTED
General Conference of the United
Methodist Church 2004

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not violate human rights and does not breed further resentment. The US should give true sovereignty to its directly and indirectly controlled countries so that the peoples of those countries can freely decide on the forms of their government, their economic, political and cultural affairs.

What can peace and human rights advocates in the United States do to help your work?

It would be very helpful if US activists committed to work together with us to slowly eradicate prejudices between and among groups of people. It would be helpful if we could together conduct trainings, seminars, conferences, caucuses and a lot more activi-

ties to provide a venue for everyone to learn and respect our differences and unite in our commonalities.

What is the most challenging element of your work? As a young woman activist do you experience discrimination within your community?

The most challenging part of my work as a community organizer is bringing together people from different faith traditions and backgrounds and uniting them around a common goal of protecting human rights and human welfare.

Philippines is a patriarchal community, so I do have to face discrimination in some cases, being a woman is a factor in daily community work but with my com-

mitment to serve the people it won't be a hindrance. As part of the women's movement in the Philippines, I will keep on doing my job until everybody's human rights are respected.

How does your faith sustain you and help your work?

My faith helps me to keep going and continue the struggle. In terms of my work, I realize that faith is central to people's lives so when you invite them to work through their faith it can be very powerful. I believe that in unity there is strength. That is why as an organizer and educator, I strive to unite people in my country. ■

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antee an international right to abortion. But as many delegates pointed out, the Beijing Platform doesn't say there is any such right. It clearly states that decisions on abortion can only be made by national governments.

Episcopal women from our delegation took the lead in organizing a caucus of U.S. groups to pressure their government to drop the unnecessary amendment. They collected hundreds of signatures from women's groups and faith groups across the U.S. and delivered them to the U.S. Mission to the UN. The Ecumenical Women Coalition produced buttons that said "Reaffirm Beijing." With hundreds of activists soon wearing those buttons, and a united front from the rest of the world's governments, the Bush Administration's representatives backed down and withdrew their amendment.

Women's groups celebrated as the governments fully and unequivocally reaffirmed the Beijing Platform and committed themselves to its implementations. Bringing a happy ending to an exhausting first week.

During the second week, the Ecumenical Women developed a collective statement which was delivered at the UN in Spanish by Alina Paucara, a young indigenous woman from Bolivia. She was one of a number of very active indigenous women at the meeting. Through their effective advocacy these women were able to get the government of Bolivia to present for the first time in the history of the Commission a draft resolution calling on governments to ensure the full and effective participation of indigenous women in relevant international processes.

In addition, several other resolutions were adopted at the Commission covering the following issues: HIV/AIDS and its im-

pact on Women, Situation of Women in Afghanistan, Women and Natural Disasters, Situation of Women in Palestine, Economic Advancement of Women, and Trafficking..

The Ecumenical Women Coalition worked hard to ensure that the resolution on Afghanistan dealt with the issue of thousands of women in the country who remain in prisons for reasons that are no longer considered criminal. These women were jailed under the Taliban for such "crimes" as wearing nail polish, or walking in the street with a male that was not a relative. The resolution called on Afghanistan's government to set them free, and to develop a national action plan for women's equality. In April the Afghan government announced its intention to develop such a plan. This and many other victories were achieved at the meeting, but much more remains to be done. The challenge in the months ahead for the Ecumenical Women will be to ensure that the promises made at the Commission on the Status of Women are not forgotten in September when world leaders will gather for a summit.

That global gathering will celebrate the UN's 60th anniversary and hopefully forge a stronger commitment to development, security and human rights for all. Crucially, the summit needs to restore support for the Millennium Development Goals, a set of eight targets agreed in the year 2000 that are supposed to cut global poverty and hunger in half by 2015.

Currently progress on the Millennium Development Goals is slow, and it is clear that they cannot be achieved without advancing the human rights and empowerment of all women in all their diversity. (The fall issue of Perspectives will focus on the MDGs).

Building on the experiences gained from working together at the 10th anniversary of the Beijing Platform, the Ecumenical Women

Coalition will work to ensure that leaders at the September UN summit pledge to advance women's rights and gender equality. ■

The **Beijing Platform for Action** was unanimously adopted by 189 governments at the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. It reflects the broadest international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace. The Beijing Platform for action defined a set of strategic objectives and spelled out actions to be taken by governments and civil society in the following twelve areas of concern: poverty, economy, power and decision-making, education, media, health, armed conflict, environment, violence, human rights, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and the girl child.

Millennium Development Goals

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

If these goals are achieved by 2015:

- More than 500 million people will be lifted out of extreme poverty
- More than 300 million will no longer suffer from hunger
- Hundreds of millions more women and girls will go to school

HELPFUL RESOURCES ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

On the Wings of a Dove
A worldwide campaign of Worlds Council of Churches'
On Overcoming Violence against women and children
25 November - 10 December
<http://www.overcomingviolence.org/>

34 Million Friends of UNFPA
Mobilizing the Grassroots to save Women's Lives
<http://www.unfpa.org/support/friends/34million.htm>

Response Magazine
UN in Our Daily Lives
June 2004 Issue
Women's Division of the United Methodist Church
www.gbgm-umc.org

Ecumenical Women 2000 Coalition
www.ecumenicalwomenuun.org

Center for Women's Global Leadership
www.cwgl.org

Women's Environment and Development Organization
www.wedo.org

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
www.peacewomen.org

Madre
www.madre.org

Equality Now
www.equalitynow.org

Amnesty International Stop Violence Against Women
Campaign
www.amnesty.org

Women Living Under Muslim Law
www.wluml.org

United Nations Fund for Women
www.unifem.org

United Nations Population Fund
www.unfpa.org

Quotes from the EW Delegation that Participated in the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Ten years after Beijing, the journey continues and we must live and work in hope and belief that one day what is written on paper will become daily practice for women wherever they live in the world. - Rosemary Wass, President of World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women

It takes more than the government to achieve equality. As Bani Dugal, chair on the NGO Committee on the Status of Women pointed out "The political climate for change, then, must begin with a fundamental change of attitude at the grassroots level." Every one of us, every civil organization is asked to join in: whether they engage in education, media, social work or business." The churches as a moral institution often holding up traditional values and reinforcing patriarchal structures are called upon to take up the issues of Beijing, as expressed in the declaration of the WCC- delegation and the statement of the ecumenical women 2000+. - Carolin Callenius, World Council of Churches, Germany

The one main concern was that the African governments spokespersons were painting a glowing picture of the continent whilst this is not so in many cases. Most of the government officials indicated that they had implemented most of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing platform for action whilst the people on the ground in most countries are not experiencing any significant change. - Elmira I. Sellu, Kenya, Regional Missionary General Board of Global Ministries

Alongside all the official CSW events, some 200 side events and workshops on various aspects of the Platform for Action took place, most organized by NGO's and co-ordinated by the NGO Committee. The Church Center for the United Nations - just opposite the United Nations - hosted most of these sessions. (United Methodist Women, one of the World Federation's members owns the building and facilitates these sessions.) Here was an opportunity to hear of the work and importance of NGO's in many countries. - Rosemary Wass, President of World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women

Despite the fact that the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women was well attended, it was not a sign that women have achieved much in the last decade. Very little progress has been made world over and it was very disappointing to realize that 10 years after Beijing there was little political will by some Member States to address gender issues. - Suzanne Matala, World Council of Churches

I continue to be disappointed that the United States is the only industrialized country that has not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and is the only country in the world that has not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Women from other countries gathered at the CSW asked why our government would not join the rest of the world to care for women, children and violence against them. - Mary Baldrige, Director Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries

Inauguration of the Ecumenical Women's Resource Center: Esther Hymer Collection

BY: KAY FRALEIGH

The Ecumenical Women's Resource Center—the home of the Esther Hymer Collection—burst with energy this spring as members of the Ecumenical Women 2000 team at the Beijing +10 Session of the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) met. Women representing the Anglican Church, the Presbyterian Church, the World Wide Young Women's Christian Association, the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Churches women, as well as the United Methodist Church came from Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the Pacific, as well as the USA to take part in the 49th session of the CSW.

The Center served as a base for the team, as they gathered material for their reports and prepared their statements. Computers rented for the occasion provided up-to-date information. The team also made good use of the readily accessible resources on women in the UN in the Esther Hymer Collection. The availability of the Center served to enhance their experience at the UN.

Today, as April draws to a close, the door to the Ecumenical Women's Resource Center, continues to be open for those doing research on the UN and women. Katelin Wilton, one of our most recent visitors, has come to the UN to follow the Commission on Sustainable Development, from 11-22 of April. She explored, in particular, the relationship of the UN with women, human rights, water, sanitation, and human settlements.

April has also brought Sarah Swofford through our doors as a volunteer for the Esther Hymer Collection. Sarah's involvement with the collection goes beyond the everyday tasks of sorting, filing, and labeling documents which are the backbone of the collection. Sarah has redesigned the index of the collection to include listings by title, author, and subject of the more than 600 books in the collection.

So, as summer approaches, we bounce along in better shape, revitalized, and inspired by the young people and the women of faith who have shared our space and made use of the resources here at 777. ■