

Preface

Twenty years have passed since the first World Conference on Women and these papers, presented at the 25th Conference of the International Federation of University Women in Yokohama, Japan, just before the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, indicate how much remains to be accomplished.

To readers unfamiliar with the issues of the Women's movement, it may seem that so much inequality remains that we must have been ineffective over the past twenty years. We forget that the present status of women has not always been where it is today. Most of the achievements of the past twenty years have been assimilated into societies and are now accepted without surprise or notice. That women become heads of state, prime ministers, ministers in the church, leaders in industry, in science and education, happens almost without comment. Yet there are still gaps. Women, even in professional positions, occupy predominantly subordinate roles rather than decision-making and leadership positions. They seem constrained by a 'glass ceiling'. Yes, they are parliamentarians - but few are Cabinet Ministers. Yes, they are clergy - but rarely bishops. The proportion of women professors is grossly less than the proportion of women teachers across the profession. It is in spheres such as that of getting women into decision-making positions that the International Federation of University Women and similar non governmental organisations have critical roles to play. We must inspire others through leadership in our own professions or through pointing to others as role models. We must speak out against injustices and inequalities. We must meet and discuss and communicate to keep on moving forward. These papers are representation of those activities.

To me, evidence of the success of the women's Movement is that so many women now feel able to look beyond their own achievements to the needs of the next generation. Interest in the Girl Child has been one of the most refreshing and motivating international issues of the past seven years. Whereas we, as adult women, can fight for our rights, girls need help. If the next generation is to see sustained development, girls must assume their rightful places in society – as girls now, and as women later.

The coming Millennium concentrates our goals and ambitions on an arbitrary point in time, the significance of which is questionable since there is debate over whether it should be celebrated on January 1st or January 1st 2001. Nevertheless it will seem a milestone in human progress. The road may look the same when viewed in front or behind, but with time we shall be looking back to say that at that point in history this or that had been achieved. By the Millennium it will be 25 years since the First World Conference on Women. We shall have gone a long way to achieving the goals of the World Conferences on Women: Equality, Development, Peace. Advances are being made all the time in equality and development. But have we advanced peace? We cannot achieve true equality without peace. The absence of peace must be one of the great hindrances to the development of peoples. Women are considered to have particular skills in peace making - an area in which they seem too often absent. Even if their skills are not unique, they deserve to be involved in matters of international, local and domestic peace, being so often 'only objects, not subjects, in questions of war and peace?'¹ They remain largely absent from international peace making and from leadership in the United Nations? Will this too change? It would be good to feel that by the year 2000, all societies will be sincerely committed to the pursuit of World Peace. Idealistic may be, but without hopes and aspirations, we shall achieve nothing.

Enjoy this book. It presents the current 'state of art' of women's position. Ironically, I hope developmental progress makes it outdated soon. Meanwhile we must congratulate the editors for compiling a representative selection of our 1995 Conference seminars. A special thanks is due to the Japanese Association of University Women for providing funding to make this publication possible.

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¹ Sipila Helvi, Reflections on a life: working for equality, development and peace. E.Friedlander (editor) *Look at the world through women's eyes* NGO Forum on Women, Beijing 1996: 265-266.