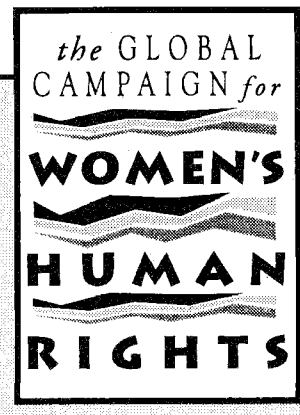

from Vienna to Beijing: the Copenhagen Hearing on economic justice and women's human rights

at the United Nations World Summit on Social Development

Copenhagen, March 1995

Center for Women's Global Leadership

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preface

The Center for Women's Global Leadership is pleased to present the complete transcript of the ***Copenhagen Hearing on Economic Justice and Women's Human Rights***[1]. This Hearing, which was co-convened by DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) and the Global Center in collaboration with the organizations listed on the title page, was held at the UN **World Summit on Social Development** in Copenhagen, March 7, 1995. The Social Summit was a particularly important site at which to present women's experiences of violations of their social and economic rights because of its focus on poverty, unemployment and social disintegration.

The Copenhagen Hearing is the third in a series of International Hearings and Tribunals that the Global Center has convened as part of the ***Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights***. The series began with the ***Global Tribunal on Violations of Women's Human Rights*** at the UN **World Conference on Human Rights** (Vienna, 1993). This Tribunal gave a public face to violations of women's human rights and helped gain recognition of gender-based violence as a human rights violation. In addition, it galvanized the appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. At the **International Conference on Population and Development** (Cairo, 1994), women sought recognition of health as a human right, and the ***Cairo Hearing on Reproductive Health and Human Rights*** underscored this demand. The ***Copenhagen Hearing on Economic Justice and Women's Human Rights*** broke new ground by highlighting US complicity in violations of socio-economic rights both within the country and internationally. This series will culminate with the ***Beijing Tribunal on Accountability for Women's Human Rights*** to be held at the UN **IV World Conference on Women** on September 1, 1995.

The Copenhagen Hearing was a watershed which challenged the world's governments to incorporate a holistic understanding of women's human rights into their economic and social policies — an understanding which underscored the indivisibility of all human rights. The Hearing built solidarity across geographic boundaries by bringing together women from the South and the North to address the impact of United States policies on their lives. In holding the United States accountable for policies which directly or indirectly violate a wide range of economic, social and cultural rights along with civil and political rights, women advanced strategies toward a more just world order. The Hearing provided a highly visible public space for women who are often not heard at UN conferences to claim their human rights and to demand that governments promote and protect these rights rather than treat them as elements of intergovernmental negotiations.

The coordinating committee for the Hearing, comprised of women from women's, economic justice, and human rights groups throughout the world, worked intensively over several months to develop the issues to be highlighted. They identified testifiers, shaped the themes and format of the Hearing, and focused the testimonies on common concerns without losing the specific conditions that women confront in their own cultural, political and geographic contexts. Testimonies were developed to reflect women's resistance and activism, rather than victimization and resignation. A set of specific demands were also developed and publicly presented to the US delegation at the Social Summit.

The Hearing testimonies covered a broad range of issues, but are linked through four categories, giving tangible meaning to the indivisibility of women's human rights across geographic, political and cultural boundaries. The first category, Economic Adjustment and Marginalization, included three testifiers: ***Cora Lee Johnson*** (US) who spoke about her struggles to obtain better housing, health care and jobs in her low-income, rural, African-American community; ***Mahfoudha Alley Hamid*** (Tanzania), a farmer and a poet, who described the adverse impact of structural adjustment policies on her farm and her family's health and

1 For clarity, some of the transcripts have been edited in conjunction with participants' written testimony.

education; and ***Carol Langlais*** (US), a mother participating in the welfare program, who called on the United States to account for the punitive aspects of welfare reform. The second section, Sexual Exploitation and Violence, began with ***Carolina Araullo*** (Philippines), a medical doctor, who spoke of violence against women, particularly in the form of military prostitution, resulting from the presence of US military bases in the Philippines. ***Shannon Booker*** (US), who suffered years of domestic abuse before killing her abuser in self-defense, testified about the connections between domestic violence, poverty and the criminal justice system.

The next section, Trade Policy, linked testimonies from the US, Canada and Mexico and described the consequences of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other economic policies on women's social and economic rights. ***Julia Quiñones de González*** (Mexico) addressed the environmental and health impact of NAFTA on women workers as well as violations of their civil and political rights. She was followed by ***Miche Hill*** (Canada), a community organizer who spoke of the destructive consequences of NAFTA in the form of increasingly restrictive social and economic policies in Canada. ***Cai Fen Lin*** (US) concluded this section by recounting the exploitative conditions she faced as an immigrant garment worker in the US, along with her involvement with Asian Women Immigrant Advocates and their Garment Worker's Justice Campaign.

The final section addressed Economic Policy, Health and the Environment. ***Rita Pereira*** (Cuba) detailed the way that the increasingly harsh conditions which have resulted from US economic sanctions affect health care and health care workers in Cuba. ***Charlotte Black Elk*** (US/Sioux Nation) concluded the Hearing by illustrating the destruction of the environment and damage done to the culture of indigenous peoples in the US by government policies.

The testimonies provided a powerful indictment of global economic forces. They offered concrete evidence of how women in the South and the North have been devastated by the recent processes of economic restructuring and structural adjustment. The stories showed how the globalization of the world economy, while facilitating increased profits for transnational corporations and financial institutions, has increased poverty and unemployment for women. With contingent and insecure employment, unemployment, dangerous working conditions and lowered wages on the rise, governments are cutting social services, health and education programs and food subsidies.

The explicit focus of the Hearing on the accountability of the United States arose from an acknowledgement of its powerful position in the world economy, as well as its self-proclaimed role as a worldwide proponent of women's human rights. The Hearing's intent was to prompt the US to take leadership in reaffirming that human rights are universal and indivisible, including the right to development and to a safe environment. However, women who testified articulated standards and recommendations which were not restricted to the United States but also spoke to UN policy, the policies of international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and national trade and economic policies of other governments as well.

The Copenhagen Hearing took place in conjunction with many activities by non-governmental organizations which challenged the presumption by governments that solutions to poverty, unemployment and marginalization reside in profit and market-centered economic expansion. Rather, groups from around the world proposed a global economic model based on gender-sensitive and people-centered sustainable development, with fundamental respect for human rights at its core. Although women did not transform the Social Summit agenda as much as we had hoped, the final Programme of Action[2] does reflect many advances for women's human rights. Among other things, the document recognizes the importance of NGOs, civil society, and women as major actors in social development. Other positive outcomes included

2 World Summit on Social Development, ***Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action***, March 1995.

- A reaffirmation of the importance of core human rights standards — civil, political, economic, social and cultural — including the right to development;
- Language about the importance of women's role in social development and the need for gender specific approaches to policy and programming. One of the ten commitments in the Declaration calls for promoting gender equality and improving the status of women (Commitment 5);
- A recognition of the increased burden on women created by poverty and social disintegration, along with the acceptance of a broad definition of the family, and a call for the quantitative consideration of the value of unrenumerated work;
- The advancement of basic workers' rights and the rights of migrant workers, as well as a commitment to respect the right of indigenous people to maintain their identity, culture and interests; and,
- Acknowledgement that structural adjustment programs must be reviewed so as to reduce their negative impact, and a request to the World Bank, the IMF and other regional development banks to give higher priority to social sector lending.

The ***Copenhagen Hearing on Economic Justice and Women's Human Rights*** represents an important step forward in the articulation of a vision of human rights which deepens solidarity among women around the world through demanding accountability from global and national institutions. Women can utilize the opening created by this event and by women's organizing throughout the world, to continue to build international networks, while insisting that the policies of governments and international institutions be based upon a new paradigm of social and economic development in which a holistic and indivisible conception of the social, economic, cultural, civil and political rights of all women is central.

Charlotte Bunch	Mallika Dutt	Susana Fried
Director	Associate Director	Senior Program Associate

acknowledgments

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Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights

from Vienna to Beijing: the Copenhagen Hearing on Economic Justice and Women's Human Rights

World Summit on Social Development
Copenhagen, March 7, 1995

program

Welcome

Mallika Dutt, Center for Women's Global Leadership

Peggy Antrobus, DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era)

Opening Remarks

Noeleen Heyser, UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women)

Testimony

Moderators: **Sonia de Souza**, DAWN
Mariama Williams, Network of East-West Women

Economic Adjustment and Marginalization

Cora Lee Johnson (Georgia, USA)
The struggle to obtain better housing, health care and nutrition

Mahfoudha Alley Hamid (Tanzania)
Adverse impact of structural adjustment programs on women and their families

Carol Langlais (Vermont, USA)
Punitive aspects of welfare policies

Sexual Exploitation and Violence

Carolina P. Araullo (Philippines)
Consequences of U.S. bases and military prostitution on women

Shannon Booker (Massachusetts, USA)
Connection between domestic violence, poverty and the criminal justice system

Trade Policy

Julia Quiñones de González (Mexico)
Impact of NAFTA and unhealthy working conditions on women workers

Miche Hill (Canada)
Impact of NAFTA and cutbacks of social spending on women

Cai Fen Lin (California, USA)
Impact of NAFTA and the Garment Worker's Justice Campaign

Economic Policy, Health and Environment

Rita Pereira (Cuba)
Devastating consequences of US economic sanctions on women in Cuba

Charlotte Black Elk (South Dakota, USA)
Environmental impact of US policies on indigenous peoples

Commentary

Chair: Susana Fried, Center for Women's Global Leadership

Commentators

Julia Häusermann, Executive Chair of Rights and Humanity and member of Global Commission on Women's Health of the World Health Organization

Dr. Clovis Maksoud, Former Ambassador of the League of Arab States at the United Nations and Director of the Center for the Study of the Global South at American University

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Endorsed by

Alt-WID (Alternative Women in Development), Atlantic Women's Fishnet, CAFRA, Caribbean Policy Development Organization, CLACSO, Center for Constitutional Rights, CRIAW/Global Feminisms Committee, La Fuerza Unidad, Health Care: We Gotta Have It, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Institute for Policy Studies, International Women's Human Rights Project of the Center for Law and Public Policy at St. John's University School of Law, International Young Women and Health Coalition, MADRE, Ms. Foundation for Women, Organizing Committee for the Decade for Human Rights Education, Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, SWOP (Southwest Organizing Project), UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), WAND, and **WIDE.**

opening remarks

Mallika Dutt
Center for Women's Global Leadership

Greetings. Welcome to the ***Copenhagen Hearing on Economic Justice and Women's Human Rights***. This Hearing, which is third in a series of Hearings and Tribunals, focuses on violations of women's economic and social rights, committed primarily by the policies and practices of the United States. It is part of the ***Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights***, a campaign comprised of over one thousand organizations around the world that have mobilized at world conferences and other events to insist that women's fundamental humanity be recognized in all policies of all governments and institutions.

The Global Campaign was launched at the **World Conference on Human Rights** held in Vienna in 1993. Using the ***Global Tribunal on Violations of Women's Human Rights*** and other mechanisms, women won the recognition first, of women's rights as human rights, and second, of violence against women as a violation of women's human integrity. At that Conference, a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women was appointed, and a call for the integration of gender into all United Nations human rights mechanisms was made in the Vienna Declaration[1]. Women won these victories after massive mobilizing and we took the gains that we made in Vienna to the **International Conference on Population and Development**, where at the ***Cairo Hearing on Reproductive Health and Human Rights***, women insisted that their health was a fundamental human right that could not be compromised by population policies, by religious fundamentalism, or by organizations that had interests other than women's dignity and human rights at their center. The success of our organizing at Cairo has led us to focus on violations of social and economic rights because we believe that women's experiences demonstrate that human rights must be understood as integrated, indivisible and holistic, and must address what happens to people in all aspects of their lives: civil, political, social, economic, cultural and environmental. All of these aspects of human rights must be ensured and respected in order to fulfill the ideals of the United Nations which was formed 50 years ago.

We have gathered at the **World Summit on Social Development** to demonstrate that the extent of human rights violations perpetrated by the United States government or with its complicity, apply to women in the North and in the South. What is unique about this gathering is the dynamic networking and building of alliances that has happened between women of the North and South in highlighting the range of human rights violations around the world. As members of households, families, communities and nations, we bring a vision and wealth of knowledge to the global dialogue about the nature of the world order we are constructing for the new millennium.

Our focus on the United States is not accidental. Because of the power the US wields in the world economy, and because it has great influence over macro-economic policies, it should be held accountable for the consequences of its policies. As a world leader that claims to stand for "liberty and justice for all," the US has a particular responsibility in stopping its own violations. By the US, we mean all levels of government at the federal and state level. However, in specifically naming the United States we do not want to exonerate any government. All governments are complicit in these violations, and we want to underscore that as women we hold them all accountable.

The values and commitments to women's human rights expressed in the programmes of action arising from the **United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development**, the **World Conference on Human Rights**, the **International Conference on Population and Development** and the **World Summit on Social Development** are meaningless without an honest recognition that the macroeconomic

1 World Conference on Human Rights, ***The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action***, June 1993.

policies pursued by many of the world's governments do not respect or promote human rights. In fact, these policies are responsible for gross violations of human rights, as is apparent in the growing gap between rich and poor and among nations, the increasing impoverishment of people, the denial of workers' rights, and punitive social service cutbacks through economic restructuring and structural adjustment programs.

At the Social Summit, our human rights are being played off against one another at the bargaining table as governments negotiate the ***Declaration and Programme of Action***. We want to underscore that women's human rights and the right to development are intertwined and inseparable issues. We will not allow any government to evade responsibility for promoting and protecting all human rights by creating false dichotomies. In addition, we insist that our human rights cannot be made bargaining chips in governments' political games. We have just heard that at meetings that are being held in Geneva at this time, the Chinese government is trying to prevent the gains of Vienna by creating obstacles to the integration of gender into all levels of UN Human Rights mechanisms.

We are here to say that as we move forward into the 21st century, we will not allow our bodies and our lives to be the playing fields for governments, and that we will not allow the gains that we have made to be reversed anywhere. At the **IV World Conference on Women**[2] in Beijing, we will strengthen our call for the accountability of the United Nations and the world's governments to promote and protect women's human rights through the final Tribunal of this series.

Women's activism at the local, national and international level demonstrates that our experiences in building and sustaining ourselves and our communities in the face of systematic violations offers vision and direction for the creation of a new world order. We call upon the United States and all governments to exercise their power in the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights. It is only through the recognition of the inherent value and dignity of each and every human being that the lofty ideals of the **World Summit on Social Development** can be made a reality.

I would now like to turn over the floor to Peggy Antrobus of DAWN, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, the co-convener of this event. We are very pleased to be in solidarity, South and North, in bringing the ***Copenhagen Hearing on Economic Justice and Women's Human Rights*** to you. Thank you.

2 To be held in Beijing, China; August 30-September 15, 1995.