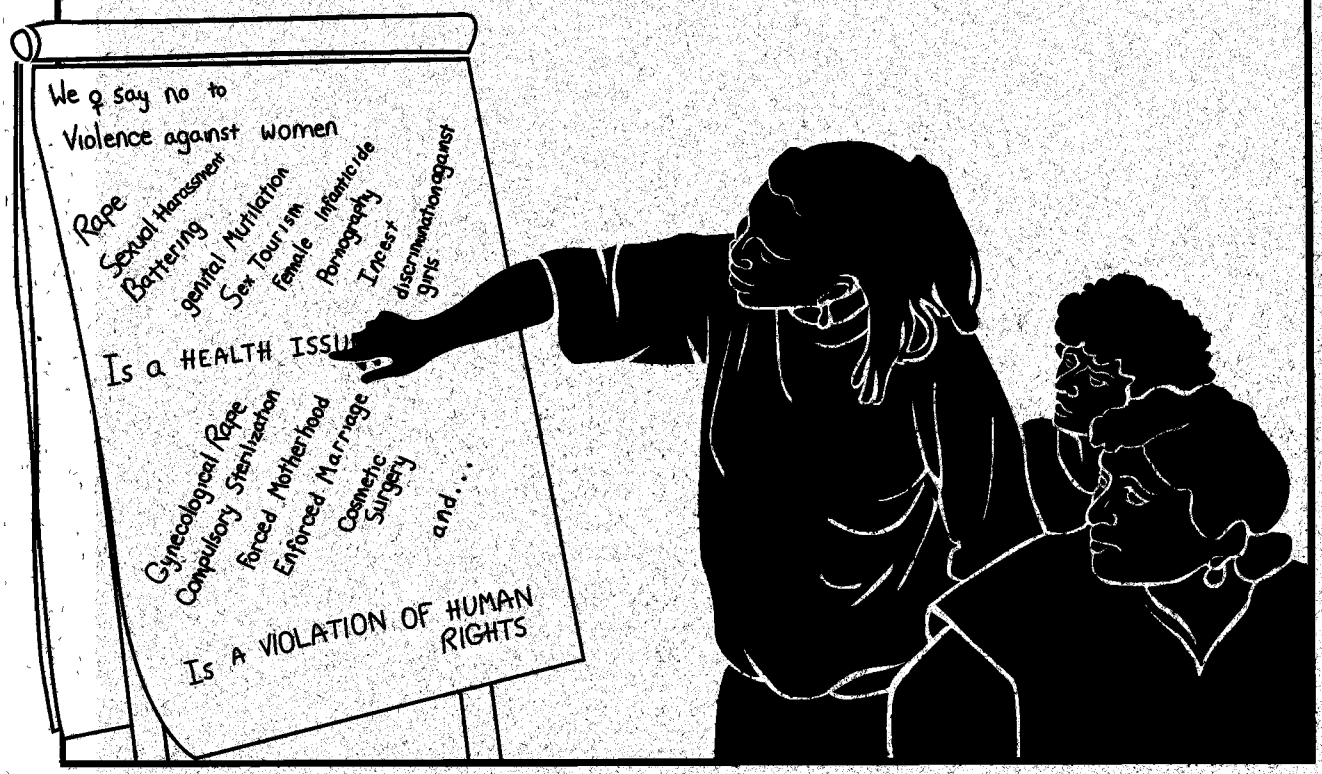
1991 WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE REPORT

WOMEN, VIOLENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS



CENTER FOR WOMEN'S GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

1991
WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP
INSTITUTE
REPORT

WOMEN, VIOLENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

CENTER FOR WOMEN'S
GLOBAL LEADERSHIP
DOUGLASS COLLEGE,
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

First Printing: May, 1992
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Printed on recycled paper
Designed and produced by Helen Granger
Printed by Magic Circle Printers

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first Women's Leadership Institute was organized out of a room in the basement of the Douglass College Chapel after the building the Center was scheduled to occupy in January of 1991 burned down two weeks before moving date. It owes its success to the patience and helpfulness of many at Rutgers and in the women's community both locally and internationally. First, it was ably guided by its coordinator, Roxanna Carrillo who worked far beyond the call of duty to give it direction and passion. The Institute also had a dedicated staff and support team consisting of Susana Fried, Diana Gerace, Niamh Reilly, Susan Roche, Lourdes Bueno, Heisoo Shin, Rosa Briceno, Kathleen Casey, Lauren McIntyre, Lisa Coxson, and Stephanie Lentini.

None of the work of the Center would be possible without the steady support of its founders, Dean Mary Hartman of Douglass College, and Ruth Mandel, Director of the Center for the American Woman and Politics at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers. We have been consistently helped by the other women's programs who shared basement rooms with us while this Leadership Institute was being organized: Institute for Research on Women directed by Carol Smith, the Laurie New Jersey Chair in Women's Studies under the guidance of Ferris Olin, and the Women's Studies Program at Rutgers New Brunswick directed by Alice Kessler-Harris. The staff of these programs and other Rutgers institutions have also helped us out in numerous ways; in particular, thanks go to Lucy Baruch, Elayne Carroll, Mary Del Gaudio, K. C. Dietsch, Mimi Herrington, Arlene Nora, Adelina Rodriguez and to Sandy Jaffee and Linda Stamato of the Rutgers Center for Negotiation and Conflict Resolution. Rutgers policy committee members Abena Busia and Joanna Regulska also helped us keep on track.

The Center for Women's Global Leadership operates as part of a network of women's organizations internationally that have given generous support to our endeavors through everything from sharing mailing lists to publicizing the Institute to giving advice about funders. Our International Advisory Committee members listed in Appendix B have helped link us to a wider network of information about what's happening in their areas. They have also provided critical advice about participants as well as political strategies.

Special mention must be made of the help given by Peggy Antrobus, Mary Ellen Capek, Amparo Claro, Liz Coit, Rhonda Copelon, Mallika Dutt, Alda Facio, Marie Aimee Helie-Lucas, Christine Ouellette, Joanne Sandler, Kate Young, and the staff of the International Women's Tribune Centre which has collaborated with us in many efforts, particularly as a co-sponsor of the UN petition campaign that grew out of this Institute. The Human Rights Watch Women's' Project in Washington D.C. and ISIS International in Santiago have also been close allies who made our job easier and more pleasant.

This report has been a collaborative effort. Lori Heise, visiting associate with the center, spent many hours listening to the tapes and working through hand written notes to prepare the first draft of the six chapters on the major themes discussed at the Institute. Rosa Briceno, Susana Fried, and Niamh Reilly have dedicated much energy to working with Charlotte Bunch, the Center's director, in preparing and editing the final document. Roxanna Carrillo, Institute coordinator who is no longer on staff but is part of our policy committee has reviewed many chapters and Ed Hatton has been called upon for proof reading services. Design and coordination of the production of this report has been the work of Helen Granger with the assistance of Cici Kinsman.

Finally, enormous thanks must go to the funders of the Institute and the Center for Women's Global Leadership during 1991, without whom none of this could happen. We appreciate their pioneering role in perceiving the importance of making connections between women and human rights and thank them for putting their confidence in the Center to carry out this work. In addition to Rutgers University, we have recevied support from:

Asia Foundation
Ford Foundation
Ruth Goodman
Joe and Emily Lowe Foundation
Seven Springs Fund
Shaler Adams Foundation
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

INTRODUCTION: THE CENTER'S GOALS AND CONCEPT OF THE INSTITUTE

The Center for Women's Global Leadership was founded as a project of Douglass College, Rutgers University in 1989. It seeks to deepen an understanding of the way in which gender affects the exercise of power and the conduct of public policy globally. Its mandate is to:

- promote the visibility of women and of feminist perspectives in public policy decision making and implementation globally;
- increase women's participation in local and national governments as well as international agencies;
- build international linkages among women in local leadership that enhance their effectiveness and expand their global consciousness.

The Center pursues these objectives through a variety of programs including an annual two week residential Women's Leadership Institute; global education events throughout the year; visiting associates; strategic planning activities; publications and a resource center. The first Women's Leadership Institute, held in June 1991, is the subject of this report.

Over the past two decades, encouraged by the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985), female leaders have worked through community-based and popular movements to formulate alternative policies in areas ranging from housing and health care to national security. Typically, however, these efforts are hampered by women's lack of institutional power and are ignored in the policymaking process which is still largely controlled by men. Thus women leaders are obstructed in their efforts to effectively advance their agendas in the public policy sphere. The programs of the Center for Women's Global Leadership aim to assist women in their efforts to overcome this structural injustice.

The Center views women's leadership as vital to ending female subordination and to formulating more effective responses to world problems. We approach the issue of leadership as both one of advancing individual women as leaders and of advancing women's collective leadership on policy issues. We therefore seek to provide opportunities for diverse women who are leaders at the local level to come together to expand their skills, to make contacts, and to develop strategies globally. We also work to make more visible the leadership that women as a group have taken in providing new perspectives and approaches to public policy issues that are often ignored at the global level. Women's leadership and feminist transformative perspectives on all issues are needed today in order to create alternative policies to those that have proven ineffective to meet the problems faced by our societies.

WHY AN INSTITUTE ON WOMEN, VIOLENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS?

The Center's first three year program is organized around a specific theme—Women, Violence and Human Rights—in order to address women's leadership from a concrete standpoint, rather than abstractly. We see this topic as a critical area where women's leadership is essential but not yet well-organized internationally. No government determines its policies toward other countries on the basis of their treatment of women, and the human rights community has generally ignored the massive violations of gender violence. Yet sex discrimination and violence are often matters of life and death as reflected in the higher malnutrition rates of girls than boys in many countries, or, in the reality of domestic violence as the leading cause of injury to women worldwide.

We also chose this focus on Gender Violence and Human Rights because it crosses national, class, racial, age, and ethnic lines. At the same time, this issue illustrates how these factors are intertwined with the subordination of women and it intersects with almost every other concern, such as militarism, racism, economic exploitation, the health crisis, etc. As women's local organizing against violence in its many forms has grown rapidly throughout the world over the past decade, there is much women can learn from each other's efforts. For while violence takes different forms according to its cultural context, the problem exists everywhere and working on it offers unique opportunities to build bridges across cultures, to learn from both similarities and differences, and to link strategies globally.

In every region, women are now focusing public debate on issues of gender violence and human rights. In response to the local initiatives of women, the international community is slowly recognizing the systemic nature of the issue and interest is growing in the topic of women's rights as human rights. For example, in February 1989, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted a resolution calling on countries to report on national legislation to protect women from violence and asked its secretariat to study the problem. Since that time, other United Nations agencies as well as a few governments and non-governmental organizations have begun to recognize the importance of gender based violence to the issues of equality, development, and human rights.

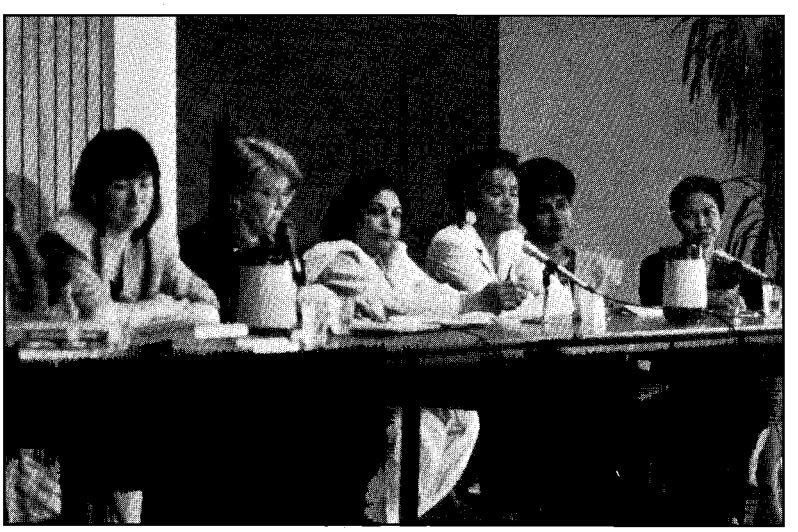
The Women's Leadership Institute was intended to strengthen women's leadership in this area and to give it a more coordinated international focus. It was designed to provide

opportunities for individual women leaders from different regions around the world to exchange experiences and to look for global responses that complement their local actions. The Institute also sought to advance women's collective leadership so that their diverse voices can be channeled to forge a feminist transformation of perspectives on all global issues—not just on "women's issues." The Institute addressed questions of how to increase women's power, to assist female leaders in the formulation of policy alternatives on these issues, and to strategize about ways to ensure that women's perspectives are included in public debates.

BACKGROUND TO THE INSTITUTE

The first year of the Center's existence (1989-1990) was spent in planning and development of the idea. This included fund-raising and discussing the Center with others in and out of the University and from around the world. The highlight of this process was an International Planning Meeting held May 28-31, 1990 to ensure input into the Center's direction from other countries at an early stage. We invited 21 women from diverse regions and projects who have considerable experience in their countries in the areas of violence and human rights and/or have been engaged in women's leadership development nationally to advise us. The participants evaluated the projected programs of the Center with an eye to what activities would most assist local groups in their area and what would have the greatest impact in shaping how the international community approaches these issues. They discussed questions that the Center should consider as priorities throughout its work, such as how to make violence against women seen as a public policy issue linked to other national priorities, like development and peace.

The International Planning Meeting considered the problem of women, violence and human rights on several levels. First, each participant reported on work being done to address violence in her region and what aspects of the problem seemed most urgent there. Second, the group looked at violence against women as an individual and family issue and discussed how it can be understood more as a major political question for society. Finally, four working groups proposed strategies around violence against women as it relates to four areas: peace and militarism; development and



Some of the participants in the New Jersey Speak-Out: Monica O'Connor, Charlotte Bunch, Hina Jilani, Qiyamah Rahman, Shamima Ali, and Siriporn Skrobanek.

multi-national corporations; cultural, racial and religious fundamentalism; and human rights. These discussions served as a guideline for shaping the sessions at the first leadership institute.

The participants also defined the Center's unique role as a cross-cultural catalyst for expanding the exploration of conceptual and practical concerns about gender violence and human rights at the international level. The focus on this topic was seen as timely, since there is both an increasing need for global coordination around gender violence and an emerging awareness of the need for women's voices in discussions of human rights. Given the early stages of these developments, the Center could play a critical part in helping to frame public policy debates and in bringing attention to the vital role women play as leaders in this area. The leadership institute was seen as an important vehicle for this work.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The first Women's Global Leadership Institute was held June 3-15, 1991 with 23 participants drawn from many fields - lawyers, policymakers, teachers, health care workers, researchers, journalists, and activists. (See list and descriptions of their work in Appendix A.) Following the advice of our international planning meeting, the first Institute was small and participants were required to commit themselves to stay for the entire two week period. This amount of time and commitment was crucial to having an in-depth cross-cultural experience where people were able to build trust, learn from each other, and develop strategies together. At the same time, we limited it to only a two week period (including time for travel) so that women with busy schedules and families would find it conceivable to take off time to come.

In order to learn more about who might be doing this work and go beyond our personal networks, the application process for the Institute was open. We mailed announcements of the Institute with an application form to about 2000 groups and individuals around the world, including women's media, asking them to spread the word. We received over 200 applications primarily from Asia, Africa, and Latin America where we had concentrated our outreach. The staff then reviewed the applications and consulted with our international advisory committee and other regional contacts in order to select the most appropriate participants.

Our criteria centered on bringing women who were local leaders with at least two years experience in women's organizing but who had not necessarily had much international exposure. We also wanted women who could be expected-based on their previous work or their organizations— to share their experience with others in their regions and to multiply the institute's impact. We sought a regional balance as well as a mixture of professions and of women working in both women's projects and with human rights groups. Further, the Institute was focused on the political and policy implications of gender violence and human rights and not primarily on services, so we wanted women with experience and interest in this area. Finally we wanted women with varying levels of expertise, both older and emerging leaders, but all of whom had demonstrated a cooperative leadership style.

The decisions proved difficult as there were three times as many good applicants as we could accommodate, and we realized how few such opportunities exist for women internationally.

Eventually we selected 23 participants from around the world: 6 from Asia and the Pacific; 5 from Latin America and the Caribbean; 4 from Africa and the Middle East; 3 from East and West Europe; and 5 North Americans with diverse backgrounds as part of our commitment to global education of women within our own region. In addition, several women from outside of the US were part of the staff and organizing team for the Institute which contributed significantly to its global flavor. (See lists in Appendix B.)

Prior to the Institute, participants were sent background materials for the sessions and asked to fill out a questionnaire on their interests, skills, and expectations for the Institute. While they were not required to write formal papers, they were asked to discuss the materials and questions with other women in their projects and to prepare with them materials they would bring to the Institute to demonstrate the work and ideas from their region. This provided a means of focusing on the topic and involving others in the experience as well as ensuring that resources from around the world were available at the Institute.

THE PROCESS AND AGENDA OF THE INSTITUTE

The two weeks of the Institute included full group plenaries, workshops, skills sessions, panels with outside resource people, and public events. Throughout the Institute participants explored gender violence in all its dimensions with a major focus on developing strategies for change, going beyond the academic seminar format of simply exchanging views at a theoretical level. The issues and skills addressed were based on the work of the Center over the past two years, the ideas expressed at the International Planning Meeting in 1990, and the suggestions and strengths of the selected participants. While outside resource people were invited for specific sessions, the participants themselves were the primary resources.

The agenda had three phases. The initial three days were internal, open to only the participants and the Center organizing team, who shared experiences, discussed projects and problems, and exchanged organizing strategies. This initial stage of the Institute provided a crucial time to build a sense of trust, explore common purposes, and define the group's priorities.

This process began with the Center's description of our goals, expectations and agenda for the Institute. Each participant then gave a presentation of the issues of violence and human rights in her region, the work of her organization, and her expectations for the Institute. On the second day, Charlotte Bunch, Director of the Center, presented our theoretical framework for approaching gender violence and human rights which was the basis for how the topics of the Institute were organized.

The rest of this phase consisted of a plenary and several workshops led by participants which focused on "Organizing and Developing Policies and Education to End Gender Violence." The Center for Anti-Violence Education/Brooklyn Women's Martial Arts also led the group in a self-defense demonstration and discussion of community efforts to prevent violence; this provided an occasion to move our bodies after days of talking as well as to introduce the participants to this type of community work.

The middle phase of the Institute consisted of four days with selected outside resource people who joined us in discussions of gender violence as related to four broad themes: "Human Rights and International Law," "Development, Militarism, and the State," "Race, Culture,

Religion and Family," and "Women's Health and Sexuality." The resource people generally came for the whole day. They were women who had worked with the Center from the University, from the wider NJ-NY-DC area, or from other countries but in the US at the time of the Institute. (See list in Appendix B). Each morning began with a panel on the day's subject consisting of both outside resource people and participants with expertise in that area, followed by a plenary discussion. In the afternoon, we met in small groups on topics that emerged out of the issues raised during the morning. While most working groups developed specific strategies, some worked on further defining the issues, and a few were skills sessions with resource people in specific areas like feminist therapy. Each group designated a note taker and a discussion leader and reported back the group's conclusions at the end of the day.

The final four-day phase of the Institute sought to solidify the group's work and prepare it for presentation to the public. A primary theme discussed in this phase was feminist organizing, structures, process and leadership. Based on the trust built in the group and the problems that had been revealed in previous sessions, the group chose to discuss issues such as the use of the term "feminist" and problems of power and leadership in women's groups. In addition, Ruth Mandel, Director of the Center for the American Woman and Politics at Rutgers, presented their work on the issues of women in public leadership. This led to a lively discussion of women in politics and how to both encourage more women to run for public office and create conditions so that they represent the concerns of women at the grass roots once there.

During this time, we looked at the interrelation of the main themes and how to work on them cross-culturally including discussion of international networking and the relationship between local groups and global projects. Throughout the Institute, women who worked with other networks, such as IWRAW (International Women's Rights Action Watch) and ISIS International or had attended international events on this topic, such as those held by The Global Fund for Women and Match International, shared their experiences and provided information on these resources. In addition we compiled a list of such networks and a calender of national, regional, and international events, days, and years related to the themes of violence and human rights. The group also discussed follow-up work that it hoped the Center would undertake, such as coordination of the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence" campaign described in the conclusion to this report.

Throughout the Institute participants shared practical skills that would enhance their work. In this final phase, special sessions were held in areas requested by some, such as fundraising, the use of computers for networking, and hands-on training in the use of video.

Finally, each participant chose an area in which she wanted to do more in depth work. Small groups further developed strategies and prepared a report for the conclusions of the Institute in the areas selected: Education, Health, Human Rights, Development, and the Law. The final day of the Institute was spent presenting working group reports, providing feedback which was subsequently incorporated into the groups' reports, and evaluating the Institute.

Two public events were also held to introduce participants to the New Jersey and New York communities. An International Women's Speak-Out entitled No More Violence:

Women Claim their Human Rights was held on June 7th at the Douglass College Student Center for the Rutgers and New Jersey communities. Seven of the participants from diverse regions spoke about work in their countries, and local women's organizations were invited to display their materials and let participants know about their work. On June 14th in New York, we held a reporting session for representatives from the UN, foundations, and non-governmental women's, human rights, and development organizations. We described the work of the Institute and introduced the participants who then presented the conclusions of the final five working groups. Those attending the meeting were also introduced so that participants could make contact with them in the future and during the reception at the International Women's Tribune Centre which followed. The reception celebrated the completion of the Institute and provided a wider context for participants to meet more people interested in their work.

THIS REPORT

This report seeks to provide basic information about the Institute and to present it as a model for organizing internationally. Participant evaluations of the Institute indicate that it was a useful approach, although they felt that we tried to cover too much territory and occasionally sacrificed in depth what we gained in breadth and diversity. Overall they liked the three phases of the agenda and the utilization of themselves as resource people. While they enjoyed meeting so many outside resource people, they felt that there had been too many to fully appreciate them.

The following six chapters of this report summarize the major discussions of the Institute and the strategies devised in each area. They do not present a sequential or verbatim description of each separate panel or working group held on that theme, but organize the information from all the sessions in that area into an overall summary. The quotes from individuals are taken from the tapes in order to provide a flavor of the meeting and to acknowledge that these ideas came from particular people. However, no one is quoted in enough detail to represent adequately their full participation, and we hope that none of the quotes is taken out of context.

These chapters are uneven because many sessions were held in some areas, like human rights, while only a few were devoted to others like religion and culture, which had no final working group developing strategies. Nevertheless, we hope that they prove valuable to those who were not at the Institute but are interested in its proceedings. In particular, we recommend the strategies sections at the end of each chapter which do represent the collective wisdom of the groups on each theme and have been edited only slightly to provide more context and clarity to the ideas. While these were the strategies developed by the working groups and were accepted by the whole body in principle, no votes were taken and every participant may not agree with all the ideas expressed here.

The conclusion of this report discusses the organizing and networking decisions of the Institute and what has been done to date. We see these as guidelines for the work of other groups and for our second Women's Leadership Institute on Women, Violence, and Human Rights to be held in the second half of June, 1992.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS

"When we first began to conceptualize our rights we called our struggle "women's rights" or "feminism." We did not think in terms of "human rights" because we were trying to understand what was distinct in women's experience. Having conceptualized "women's rights" we now know what is missing in the mainstream definition of human rights. Our demand that "women's rights are human rights" is a return to the mainstream, but not to fit ourselves in on the old terms, but to transform the very definition of human rights."

—CHARLOTTE BUNCH

A vision of "human rights" transformed was the underlying force that motivated the Institute as women worked to understand the complexity of existing international organizations and law while struggling to push beyond their limitations. Workshops and panel discussions explored a range of topics, from the agendas of the U.N. human rights bodies and NGOs like Amnesty International, to a feminist reconceptualization of "human rights." Participants came away with a better sense of the work to be done and of new possibilities for collaboration and action.

A core question for feminists is whether the notion of "rights" and international law offer anything useful to women in their struggle for equality and dignity. Some argue that international human rights instruments are formal, distant documents unlikely to empower women or women's communities in securing greater control over their lives. At the same time, as Bunch points out in her background paper for the Institute, "Women's Rights as Human Rights: Toward a Re-Vision of Human Rights,"[1] the notion of human rights is one of the few moral visions ascribed to internationally and is one of the few concepts that speaks to the need for transnational activism and concern about the lives of people globally. The group generally agreed to the usefulness of a human rights framework, although there was much discussion about its limitations as presently conceived.