Migrant Women's Human Rights in G-7 Countries

Organizing Strategies

Family Violence Prevention Fund
and
Center for Women's Global Leadership

THE FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION FUND (FUND), founded in 1980, is a national, education, training, and policy organization dedicated to ending domestic violence. Since its inception, the FUND has been a leader in the development of innovative responses to domestic violence, developing pioneering prevention strategies and programs in the fields of public education, health care, justice, and child welfare. The FUND's mission is to create a society in which domestic violence is not accepted, tolerated or excused, by educating the public, initiating prevention strategies that emphasize community-based solutions, advocating for institutional changes to respond to domestic violence, creating public policy on domestic violence, and providing direct advocate services to victims, particularly those from marginalized groups. The FUND has established its Battered Immigrant Women's Rights Project to strengthen the legal, civil and human rights of immigrant women experiencing abuse in their homes.

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THE CENTER FOR WOMEN'S GLOBAL LEADERSHIP at Douglass College seeks to develop an understanding of the ways in which gender affects the exercise of power and the conduct of public policy internationally. The Center's goals are to build international linkages among women in local leadership that enhance their effectiveness, expand their global consciousness and develop coordinated strategies for action; to promote visibility of women and feminist perspectives in public deliberation and policy- making globally; and to increase participation of women in national and international governing bodies and processes. The Center's activities are based on seeing women's leadership and transformative visions as crucial in every policy area from democratization and human rights, to global security and economic restructuring. Further, such global issues are interconnected and have both local and international dimensions. The creation of effective policy alternatives demands the full inclusion of gender perspectives and women in all decision-making processes and requires an understanding of how gender relates to race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and culture.

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A banner displayed at a Tokyo, Japan street demonstration to protest trafficking of women and bring into light the issue "comfort women" in April 1994.

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MIGRANT WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS IN G-7 COUNTRIES

ORGANIZING STRATEGIES

EDITED BY:

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AND

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About the Contributors

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at the UN women's gathering. Louie has also worked with Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, which organizes women working in the garment, electronics, hotel, restaurant and nursing home industries.

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Hannana Siddiqui is a community caseworker and counselor at Southall Black Sisters in England, where she has worked for several years addressing the needs of black (Asian, African and Caribbean) women. She assists women confronting domestic violence and forced arranged marriages, homelessness, matrimonial issues, racial harassment and discrimination, financial and welfare benefits advice and immigration difficulties. Hannana has undertaken developmental and campaign work on behalf of women who have been killed; the release of a woman who killed her abuser; to reform the homicide laws; and, to reform immigration laws. Prior to her work at Southall Black Sisters, Hannana worked as a coordinator at a London-wide Asian women's organization and in race relations and housing. She has a BSC (Hons) degree in Social Sciences from the London School of Economics.

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Mallika Dutt
Leni Marin

INTRODUCTION

Organizing efforts for migrant women's human rights have developed dramatically over the last decade as the number of women who migrate and get uprooted from their homes have increased significantly. Women in both the sending and receiving countries have found that only by forging links can they advance their struggle for improved living conditions; fair wages; and human rights.

This publication is another step toward increasing the understanding of the complex nature of issues affecting migrant women. It makes available the organizing strategies presented by migrant women at the NGO Forum of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, 1995, at a panel discussion entitled "From Margin to Center: Migrant Women's Human Rights in G-7 Countries."

The panel discussion held in Beijing evolved out of a long-term effort to make the injustice and violation of the human rights of migrant women more visible. In the United States, the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FUND) and the Northern California Coalition for Immigrant Rights, formerly the Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Services (CIRRS), held a day long tribunal in San Francisco that brought together testimonies from migrant women detailing the human rights abuses they have experienced in the U.S. including violence against women at the border, sexual abuse from employers, inhuman conditions in refugee camps, domestic violence perpetrated by US-citizen spouses, and others. That tribunal was a build up towards the participation at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993.

At the Vienna Conference, the Center for Women's Global Leadership coordinated an all day Global Tribunal on Violations of Women's Human Rights which was followed by similar hearings and tribunals at subsequent UN world conferences. The series of tribunals and hearings highlighted the experiences of migrant and refugee women in relation to issues of violence, economic discrimination, political persecution and health. The FUND and CIRRS also presented a workshop in Vienna, entitled "Women on the Move," which examined abuses against women during migration; gender-based persecution and political asylum and conditions for women in receiving countries. These initiatives enabled the organizers and participants to work together on common strategies and initiate networking on behalf of migrant women's rights on an international level.

This working relationship was further developed through collaboration on a variety of workshops dealing with migrant women's issues at the Fourth World Conference on Women in China during the NGO activities. Specifically, the FUND,

the Center for Women's Global Leadership and CIRRS jointly organized the workshop "From Margin to Center: Migrant Women's Human Rights." The organizing experiences and strategies of the women who presented in China and those of other groups and individuals have been compiled in this book, *Organizing Strategies*.

Neither France nor Germany were represented at the workshop "From Margin to Center" at the Fourth World Conference on Women in China, nor does this publication contain contributions from those countries. We fully recognize that a great deal of work is being done by activists in France and Germany on behalf of migrant women. We hope that *Organizing Strategies* will be a step toward linking all the work within the Group of Seven countries (U.K., Canada, U.S.A., Germany, France, Italy and Japan).

Organizing Strategies is for all those engaged in social change work. The organizing efforts documented in this publication are meant to be used by migrant women to advance their own organizing, by human rights activists to incorporate a more holistic approach to their work, by women's groups to understand the needs of migrant women, and by labor organizations to ensure that migrant women's work is incorporated into their organizing. The international and intersectional nature of the book should build stronger and better bridges among all the constituencies who care about advancing justice at many different levels. These can include service delivery, public awareness, community-based organizing, public policy and legislative change.

At the same time that this report is published, a growing xenophobia and racism in the G-7 countries has led to a concurrent rise in immigrant bashing. Right-wing politics scapegoats migrant communities for existing economic problems and increase the vulnerability of migrant people to further exploitation and violence. Such policies are being resisted by migrant women living in the North who have begun to organize and assert their human rights.

Migrant women's voices are being heard in a variety of forums, from agricultural areas to urban centers, from schools to government institutions. They are demanding enforcement of minimum wages and decent working conditions in agricultural work, apparel industries, domestic work and mechanized industries. They are insisting on access to education and decent schools for themselves and their children. They are calling for an end to domestic violence and gender-based oppression within their own communities. Migrant women can be found battling xenophobia and racism in all spheres of society; they are standing up to violence on the streets and to prejudice within the women's movement.

Migrant women are also using a variety of strategies to demand their human

rights. Community organizing brings together not just women but all members of a community in confronting the various forms of oppression they experience in the North. Advocacy efforts range from representing the interests of individuals in government agencies, to demanding benefits and insisting on more structural change. Public education and awareness raising are employed to teach migrants about their rights as well as to dispel the many myths that abound in their adopted societies. Public policy and legislative efforts are underway to ensure that government plans and laws are developed and implemented in a way that protect basic human rights. International mobilization and networking have been used to ensure that recent UN conferences understand that no assertion of women's rights as human rights can ignore the experiences of migrant women.

In bringing together the women who shared their experiences at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, the organizers of "From Margin to Center: Migrant Women's Human Rights" hoped to make more visible the pathbreaking work that is being done by migrant women around the world. These experiences are not only relevant to the lives of migrant women in the North but integral to the vision that informs the global women's movement. In confronting the growing polarization of the world into haves and have nots, in addressing the globalizing of the world economy which requires cheap exploitable female labor to survive, in stemming the tide of growing fundamentalism, migrant women have demonstrated time and again their strength, resilience and capacity for struggle.

We hope that *Organizing Strategies* will enable readers to understand that oppression is multi-dimensional and, therefore, struggle and resistance must be multi-dimensional as well. The experiences of the women whose voices are present in this publication should assist activists in crafting policies and programs that better reflect the needs and rights of migrant women.

The wisdom of migrant women runs through the pages of this report. It is our hope that this wisdom continues to inform the movement for social change. It is only by bringing the voices of all marginalized communities together that we can transform our world into one where the respect for human rights is the bedrock by which we live our lives.

G7: OVERVIEW

Migrant Women and the Global Economy

BY MALLIKA DUTT
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Migrant women play a specific, critical role in the global economy, as revealed by current economic transformations. Technological changes, the directions of capital flows and the increasing presence of transnational corporations all rely heavily on cheap female migrant labor to maintain their profit bases. For example, there has been a large shift from full-time jobs with benefits to contingent and temporary jobs. Exploitative working conditions with little or no benefits abound and migrant women provide the linchpin in the maintenance of these new structures.

Working conditions of a temporary and exploitative nature are not a new phenomenon for migrant women. What is particularly interesting to explore at this moment in history is the fact that what has been the reality for migrant women is now becoming the model of work for increasing numbers of women around the world. Governments experiencing economic restructuring, structural adjustment programs and the burdens of debt which are now affecting more and more women have always relied on migrant women to balance their payments. For example, women from the Philippines who have been working overseas as domestic workers, nurses, prostitutes and garment workers have provided a critical source of foreign exchange for their government.

The increase in the number of migrant women performing different kinds of work has been accompanied by an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment. Countries are increasing penalties for undocumented entry, tightening