

The Bangkok Declaration

Over four hundred women communicators from media organisations and networks in more than 80 countries in all continents of the world met in Bangkok, Thailand (12-17 February 1994) to discuss issues related to the theme of Women Empowering Communication. The conference was organised by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) in London, Isis International in Manila and International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC) in New York. The following is the final statement approved by participants.

Our goal is a more just, people-centred and sustainable world order. We are concerned about development trends: globalisation of economies and the media. This is leading to centralisation of control over both resources and decision-making, with the result that one culture dominates and marginalises women, nature, minorities and indigenous and Third World peoples.

Women are concerned with the basic needs of our societies, with the creation of life and the preservation of the environment, but we are at the bottom of all hierarchies including religious bodies. If our interests are met, the interests of all humanity will also be satisfied.

As women working in communication, we see our role as one of ensuring that women's interests, aspirations and visions are centrally located and disseminated.

The so-called 'mainstream' media are a male-dominated tool used by those in power. At the global level they are controlled by the North; nationally they are in the hands of the local elite. As they are now structured, the media propagate unsustainable lifestyles, militarism, growing pauperisation and consumption patterns which turn people into consumers not only of goods but of ideas and ideologies: women, children and the majority of men are invisible and their voices are unheard. There is particular lack of respect for the integrity and dignity of women: stereotyped and dehumanised, we have been turned into commodities. The excessive use of violence in these media is destroying the sensibilities of all humanity.

For all these reasons it is essential to promote forms of communication that not only challenge the patriarchal nature of media but strive to decentralise and democratise them: to create media that encourage dialogue and debate; media that advance women and peoples' creativity; media that reaffirm women's wisdom and knowledge, and that make people into subjects rather than objects or targets of communication. Media which are responsive to people's needs.

In the years since the Nairobi World Conference on Women, which closed the United Nations Decade for Women in 1985, our networks and levels of organisation have grown. We have made many interventions and taken many actions at all levels: local, national,

regional and international yet despite our achievements, negative global trends have become more powerful.

In this context, we examined various strategies aimed at strengthening and empowering our communications. They include:

- Strengthening peoples', and more specifically women's media, including story-telling, visual and performances arts, which build on their knowledge, wisdom and creativity.
- The integration of humane values into our media creations such as harmony with nature, cooperation, nurturing, caring, love and compassion, and our struggles for freedom, to ensure that our alternatives do not become hierarchical, undemocratic and elitist.
- Education and Training methodologies to access existing media for women's organisations and community groups in order that they can effectively communicate their own messages and concerns.
- Increased opportunities for technical training for women in the area of communications.
- The incorporation of gender-sensitivity, local history and cultural diversity in the education and training of professionals in the field of communications.
- The development of national curricula that encourages critical thinking among future generations through formal and non-formal education.
- The expansion of gender-specific media research and documentation at the local level.
- Promoting lobbies and campaigns directed at opinion makers and media consumers to raise public awareness on how issues of development affect women.
- Strengthening monitoring networks with legal backing to guarantee the democratic functioning of media.
- Networking.
- Strengthening our linkages with potential allies throughout hierarchies (government, politicians, corporations, donors, media managers) to turn strategies into concrete actions.
- Building links and solidarity between women and gendersensitive men working in media at all levels and in all conditions.
- Continuing to build links among women's networks and forge broader links with other people-oriented networks.
- Pinpointing special networking considerations and strengthening information exchanges: between urban and rural groups and organisations, across language barriers, at varied levels of consciousness and access to technology, in oppressive conditions.
- Ensuring the widest and most appropriate dissemination of information related to United Nations meetings that concern people's lives and future, including training in methodologies on how to use this information.

- Women's participation and the inclusion of women's perspectives to be assured in all stages of the preparatory process of these meetings.
- We also called on the conference organisers to spearhead the following activities:
- A worldwide effort to document all forms of women's communication practices, and organise workshops on how they can be used effectively.
- Explore possibilities for establishing a women's satellite network.
- Ensure swift global dissemination of women's views at the 1995 World Conference on Women and NGO Forum in Beijing via satellite communications.
- Organise a video production on women's lives around the world for viewing and dissemination at Beijing.
- Build support for one day during the Beijing conference when media houses worldwide promote programming by and about women.
- Organise one day at the start of 1995 for the monitoring of all media and use data as the basis for an analysis of where women are.
- Build support for 1996 to be declared International Year of Women Communicating.

We further recognise that to achieve our goal of social justice and participatory democracy, we shall have to bring pressure to bear on those who now hold power. And so we identified the following strategies on which to focus these efforts:

Governments and Policy-Makers

To implement the numerous international conventions and agreements relating to women including the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights, Agenda 21.

Funding Organisations

To re-examine their funding policies giving priority to strengthening women's media and communications networks through support that is relevant, practical and substantial.

Addendum

Further expressions of concern and various calls were made at the final plenary session of the Conference. They are:

- Concern for increasing religious fundamentalism with its accompanying violence and suppression of women's voices.
- A recognition that women have a right to control their sexuality and that in our role as communicators we should not perpetuate the invisibility of lesbians, nor assume that all persons are heterosexuals.

- A call on all governments to release writers and journalists who are political prisoners.
- Concern about the exploitation of young girls and women in the sex industries.