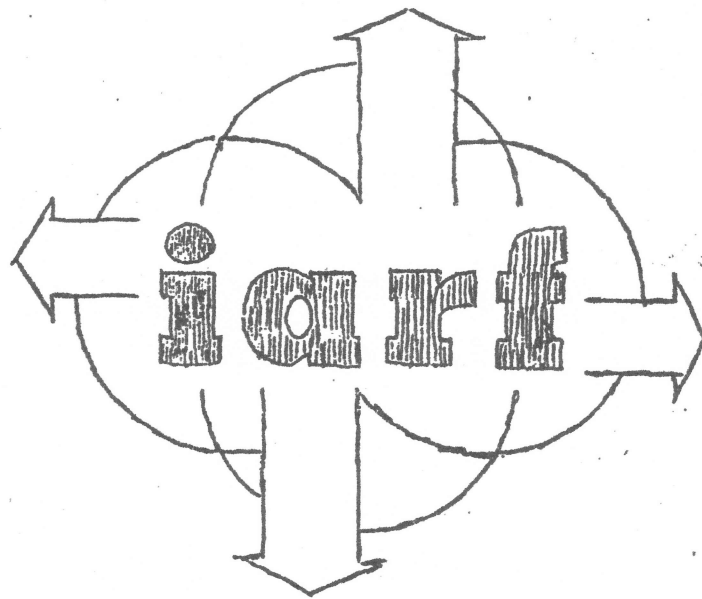

"Challenging Patriarchal Vision"

Statement by the
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women
Copenhagen/Denmark 14-30 July, 1980

"CHALLENGING PATRIARCHAL VISION"

Statement by the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF, an international NGO in Category II), for presentation at the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, Copenhagen, Denmark, 14 - 30 July 1980.

The International Association for Religious Freedom, comprised of 45 Member Groups in 20 countries on all continents forms a world community of liberal movements in all religions affirming the kinship of all people. In the following statement we address what we see as the underlying source of thought patterns which permit women to be universally diminished and pushed to the periphery of cultures.

"We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of all human beings. This means that, in formulating goals and policies, we give all people equal consideration and equal preference". (Q 1)

However, we also realize the "religious teachings and myths, historical materials, generic language, and other resources perpetuate assumptions and attitudes that cause the talents of women throughout the world to be overlooked and underused, and (that) people of all ages and both sexes internalize and act on cultural models, thereby tending to cause women to limit their self-worth and dignity". (Q 3)

We believe, therefore, that in all cultures our current understanding of reality which allows us to devalue and diminish women is a major obstacle in attaining the objectives of the U.N. Decade for Women, "Equality, Development and Peace". These patriarchal perceptions of reality result in erroneous conceptions and myths in our understanding of the nature of women and men, the nature of the environing cosmos, the relation between humankind and the cosmos, and the consequent relationship between women and men and between humankind and nature.

Until recently, patriarchal understanding of reality has been the only understanding available to us. Feminism is providing an alternative perception. There are fundamental perceptions in patriarchal thought which sanction and promote a hierarchy in human relationships, promote the inherent right of men to be superior and dominant, and hold that women are inferior and should be submissive to men.

We claim that patriarchal understanding is false because it is partial and is therefore biased. We hold that, to benefit women as full and equal human beings, efforts must be directed toward eradicating the assumption that a hierarchy rightly exists in relationships between women and men. Moreover, we hold that action to improve the status of women must involve men and women alike, for we shall be rethinking the traditional values of all people.

There must be a true revolution in consciousness if we are to challenge the current understanding of reality which stands as the major obstacle to women's full participation in the cultures of the world. This objective of challenging patriarchal vision, and restructuring our understanding of reality, establishes a very long-term goal. "We believe that the validity of such long-range goals depends on our capacity to elaborate realistic transitional steps leading towards these long-range goals". (Q 1)

We, in the International Association for Religious Freedom have established one transitional step by resolving:

"that the IARF, its affiliated organizations, and member groups shall be urged... to take immediate action to increase the number of women in their policy-making positions, to accept women on equal terms in all respects with men, in ministerial, educational, and administrative posts". (Q 2)

We believe that "international human rights machinery should also move aggressively to eliminate gross patterns of discrimination based on race, sex, or other invidious distinctions" (Q 1). The United Nations is itself the prime agency where justice and human rights should be modeled for all the world to see, and we urge all nations to work ceaselessly toward bringing women into full representation in that body. United Nations employment is presently distributed on a quota system to assure geographic representation, as suggested in the Charter. The Charter calls equally firmly for equality between the sexes in U.N. employment (Article 8). The quota system for employment should be changed to assure the fulfillment of the Charter-required goal as well. We urge all national delegates to make this goal an objective of this Conference.

Within the long-range goal of revising those patriarchal perceptions of reality that sanction and promote a bias against women, the IARF hopes to replace prejudicial understandings with an ethos, a world view, favorable to equality and justice for women and men alike; and to work for establishment of an intellectual and social environment where the contributions of all are valued in the universal search for global development and peace.

We hope to join others and have others join us in working towards this end.

Sources of Quotations:

1. IARF Manifesto on the World Community. (Montreal, 1975)
2. IARF Resolution: "Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women" (Montreal, 1975)
3. IARF Resolution: "Women, Religion and Human Dignity" (Oxford, 1978)

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Background information for the IARF statement

CHALLENGING PATRIARCHAL VISION

We are nine years into the United Nation's designated Decade For Women with the end of the decade Conference and Forum scheduled for July 1985 in Nairobi, Kenya. Will those who represent liberal religious women as officially appointed observers of the International Association for Religious Freedom have a voice at those meetings? That may depend on action taken by the International Association of Liberal Religious Women at its meeting in Tokyo.

The decade began with two parallel meetings in Mexico City in 1975, the World Conference and the International Women's Year Tribune. The Tribune was open to those women who managed to get to Mexico City for that occasion but the governmentally appointed delegates were the only ones who could participate in the meetings at the Conference. Observers, appointed by non-governmental organizations such as the International Association for Religious Freedom were permitted to sit in at the Conference meetings and speak with and lobby individual delegates in the halls and at social functions.

When I was appointed, along with Rita and Howard Taubenfeld who shared the other observer appointment, I immediately sought specific positions regarding women which had been taken by the IARF that would reflect the membership position on any aspect of the Conference theme, "Equality, Development and Peace."

No position at all existed. Therefore there was no basis for lobbying governmental delegates in the name of the (the IARF) the organization that I represented. In order to change this situation for future observers as soon as possible, the issue was introduced on the agenda of the IARF Congress which was to meet later in the summer of 1975 in Montreal, Canada.

Alice Kimball, 1975 Conference Chair of the International Union of Liberal Christian Women (now the IALRW) invited me to report on the Global Conference and Tribune at the meeting in Montreal immediately preceding the IARF meeting. On that occasion I presented a draft of a resolution which Rita and I had worked on while we were still in Mexico City.

The response was gratifying. A number of women worked late into the night writing the resolution in a final form to be presented at the business meeting on the following day. It was adopted as "Equal Rights and Opportunities For Women." The resolution which urged the IARF to adopt the same resolution was voted unanimously by the membership present at the IALRW meeting. At the IARF Congress which followed those present voted overwhelmingly in favor of the resolution as submitted.

The IALRW and the IARF may have been the first international organizations to take action as a result of the International Women's Conference. Future observers from the IARF had at least one

in Mexico City

position on women on which to base their lobbying. More important, however, IARF had officially recognized women as a viable group within its membership.

However, a broader and more inclusive position was needed. The resolution "Equal Rights and Opportunities For Women" sought equality with men for those women who desire and reach for a place in the hierarchy of religious institutions. An IARF position that recognized the secondary status of all women everywhere was required if we were to speak to the issue of equality of women and men within the IARF and also speak to the same issue in the name of our international organization (the IARF) in the larger world.

The IARF now has such a position and the IALRW helped to bring that about. Early in 1977 Drusilla Cummins, then president of the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation requested that I submit for the Federation's Biennial the following April a resolution similar to the "Women and Religion" resolution which was already working its way through the resolution process of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

The resolution titled "Religion and Human Dignity" was adopted by the UUWF Biennial. That resolution not only pointed to the "assumptions and attitudes that cause the talents of women throughout the world to be overlooked and underused" but it also named religious myths (of patriarchal religions) as one of the root causes of those biased assumptions and attitudes.

The "Religion and Human Dignity" resolution, appropriately revised and titled, "Women, Religion and Human Dignity," was submitted at the IALRW and the IARF Congress in Oxford, England, August 1-3, 1978. It was adopted by both international organizations.

Only three years after the International Women's Year Conference IALRW and IARF were on record with two positions regarding women and equality. Future IARF designated observers could incorporate these positions in statements at Global Conferences. However, one important step remained to be taken. The thrust of the two resolutions had not been incorporated into a statement generally applicable to issues considered at Global Conferences.

The need for an approved statement became critical in 1979. One result of International Women's Year was the Decade For Women declared by the United Nations with a mid-decade Conference and Forum scheduled for 1980. After some complications with other sites Copenhagen, Denmark became the place and July 14-30 became the date.

Preparations began for the Copenhagen meetings. The IARF Secretariat was helpful along the way--first of all by announcing that the IARF Board must approve any statement made in Copenhagen. That was the stimulant needed to get us moving.

Time was short and did not allow for taking the normal route for adopting positions for the IALRW and the IARF since neither organization would meet again until 1981, well after the mid-decade meetings. In November of 1979 I submitted the first draft of a statement that might be presented in Copenhagen to the IARF Board. The statement, based on the two resolutions on women adopted in 1975 and 1978 and the IARF Manifesto on the World Community, 1975,

was adopted by the IARF Board with the requirement that any editing did not change the meaning of the statement. Jutta Reich, then president of the IALRW was designated as the person to read the statement at the Conference if the occasion arose.

Many, including the Board of the UUWF were invited to help with the editing of "Challenging Patriarchal Vision". Carolyn Howlett, then President of the IARF assisted in the final editing. The IARF office in Frankfurt mailed 750 copies to the United Nations Secretariat in Copenhagen where the Official U.N. Document cover page was supplied and attached.

Lili Hahn, UUWF United Nations Non-Governmental representative, was one of the appointed observers. She also assisted the working staff at the Conference by typing information on the cover pages. She typed our cover page and assigned it NGO/1. The majority of those 750 copies were distributed among the delegates of those 140 nations participating in the Conference. You have a copy of the statement as distributed in your packet. The observers also conducted two workshops, titled "Women as influenced by Religion" at the Forum and the IARF Secretariat provided a banner to be used by the observers whenever appropriate.

Liberal Religious Women had a voice in Copenhagen. "Challenging Patriarchal Vision" was a statement both timely and future oriented. Others were impressed by the forward looking Association we represented.

FUTURE

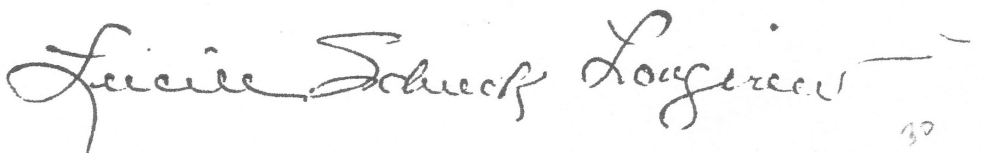
IALRW should be planning for Nairobi in 1985 and this Tokyo meeting needs to be certain that IARF observers are able to speak for and to distribute materials that represent our perspective. More than that, however, our perspective as liberal religious women must extend beyond Women's Conferences. All issues are women's issues. All Global Conferences need women's perspective-- disarmament, population, hunger, environment, the elderly, children, the disadvantaged, etc. We must endeavor to have our voices heard and our presence meaningful at all Global Conferences.

We have done a lot of work to bring our Liberal Religious Women's perspective into the IARF. We must help wherever we can to see that it is integrated into all aspects of the organization and into the positions the IARF takes in our work as a non-governmental organization in the world community.

It is a great opportunity and also a tremendous responsibility for the IARF to participate in United Nation's sponsored global conferences. IALRW needs to be as helpful as possible in the process of choosing observers and supplying background for statements made in the name of the IARF. Now is the time to begin that wider participation.

Greetings and best wishes for an exciting and fulfilling meeting!

Lucile Schuck Longview
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July 15, 1984



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