

World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet,  
Miami, Florida November 12, 1991

WOMEN'S ACTION AGENDA 21

People everywhere are frightened by evidence of the deterioration of the life giving systems of the Earth. We, women of many nations, have come together to voice our concern for the health and well being of our living planet and all its life forms.

We come together as a privileged few who speak on behalf of those who could not be with us, the millions of women who experience daily the violence of poverty, environmental degradation and exploitation of their work and bodies due to an international economic order that places capital before human and ecological well-being.

We have listened to each other speak of the ills of our societies, our families and our sacred Nature. We have been inspired by the courage and commitment of our sisters throughout the world who protect and repair our natural heritage. Yet we know their efforts will be in vain if pollution, over-exploitation and disregard for the integrity of Nature does not cease.

In a world in which Nature and women are systematically exploited by a so-called "free market" ideology, there can be no environmental security. Rain forest dwellers, island peoples, the inhabitants of fragile arid or arctic zones are threatened with displacement and dispossession due to human disruption and pollution of vulnerable ecosystems. In a world that condones such practices, there lies little hope for long term survival or peace among peoples.

We believe that a healthy and sustainable environment is contingent upon respect for human rights, participatory democracy, the self determination of peoples, respect for indigenous peoples and their lands, cultures, traditions and the protection of all species.

We believe that basic human rights include access to clean air and water, food, shelter, health and well-being. These rights are currently denied to millions of people, the overwhelming majority of whom are women.

We are deeply troubled by the increasing inequities in the quality of life of those living in the industrialized nations and those of the so-called "developing" nations. We are outraged by the disparity between our children's nutrition, well-being, education



and opportunities for a full and productive life. We condemn the racism and disrespect of diversity on which this inequity feeds.

We equate lack of political and individual will among world leaders, the great majority of whom are men, with a lack of basic morality and spiritual values and an absence of responsibility towards future generations.

Based on "economic growth" and ludicrous investments in weaponry, the current development model has wrought human and environmental degradation and destruction. Unbridled consumerism of the industrialized nations leads to unjust exploitation of the human and natural resources of poor nations, which results in coopting governments and the political process for the benefit of the few.

We come together to pledge our commitment to the empowerment of women, the central and powerful force in the search for equity between and among the peoples of the Earth and for a balance between them and the life support systems which sustain us all.

We undertake our Action Agenda on behalf of our families and future generations.

We appeal to all women and men to join in this call for profound and immediate transformation in human values and activities.

#### A C T I O N S:

Actions:

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

#### ----- DIVERSITY AND SOLIDARITY

Recognizing that Nature is not limited by national sovereignty or boundaries and that environmental degradation is global,

Observing the worldwide social and environmental consequences of development based solely on economic growth measurements,

Recognizing the creative diversity of our culture, class, race and the ecosystems and political structures within which we live,

Believing that the world's indigenous peoples have long been denied basic human rights or acknowledgement of their contributions to world culture,

Recognizing the interconnectedness of women, the environment, economic policies, development strategies, social justice and the survival of all species,

we will promote the principles of this Action Agenda and encourage people everywhere to use political and economic means to make its



recommendations a reality.

we will protect all those who uphold these principles from forces which would silence their voices or stand in the way of environmental and social justice.

we will demand full and equal participation for women and men in public policy analyses, government, decision-making, implementation, administration and funding at international, national and community levels.

we urge each other to seek to achieve a critical mass in government and non-governmental policy making leadership positions, adopting the 60-40 formula (no more than 60% or no less than 40% of either sex) as a guide to our empowerment.

we demand that all governments comply with the requirements of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

we will organize a committee to publicize, coordinate and assist women's action in issuing report cards on progress toward a healthy community, village, region or nation.

----- DEBT AND TRADE

In full knowledge that the industrialized nations have been the net beneficiaries of the exploitation of the rich resources of the South,

Observing the disastrous social, environmental and economic consequences of international lending practices and current terms of trade between industrialized and non-industrialized nations and

Concerned about the negative impact on the poor, especially women, of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank structural adjustment policies,

Ashamed by the flow of capital from poor nations to the banking systems of rich nations and

Recognizing the grievous consequences of this practice for poor families in the South and for the natural resources upon which we all depend

we demand immediate official debt forgiveness

we will work for cancellation of commercial debt via mechanisms equivalent to corporate bankruptcy law,

we will cease to do business with banks which refuse to reschedule

debt repayments of nations of the South.

**we will oppose those debt for nature exchanges (swaps) which threaten sovereignty, indigenous peoples rights to land and self determination and which are not subject to wide public debate.**

**we will hold personally accountable those who borrow in the name of their people, for the social and environmental consequences of those loans**

**we call for the rejection of structural adjustments policies (SAPs) which shift the responsibilities of basic social services from governments to women without compensation or assistance.**

**we call for the dismantling of all unfair protective trade measures used by the North against the South**

**we call for re-negotiation of terms of trade that will ensure an equitable relationship between the price of raw materials and prices of manufactured goods**

**we demand a total ban on the export of goods rejected for local consumption ( or destruction ) in or by the country of origin**

**we suggest that historic audits of nation states (from 1945 onward) be conducted to determine the net beneficiaries of natural resource exploitation, an assessment which would serve as the basis to cancel current debt.**

----- **UNIVERSAL CODE OF ETHICS**

**Recognizing the current moral and ethical double standards applied to environment, development, women's participation and social justice throughout the world and**

**Distressed that policy planners and political representatives have such barren instruments (systems of national accounts) on which to make all major economic and environmental decisions,**

**we will work for the adoption of an International Code of Environmental Conduct for business and industry, for governments, for UN agencies and for non-governmental organizations which will include regulations on bio-technical genetic engineering.**

**we will organize monitoring systems that will hold institutions and states accountable for their actions, products and policies**

*Verônica  
Sturme*

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

**we call for a reappraisal of national income accounts to reflect the balance between constructive and destructive production**

**we totally oppose environmental accounting and the commodification of "free gifts of Nature"**

**we demand qualitative indicators of the environment**

**we demand time use studies of women's work (household, cottage industries, subsistence agriculture, child care, elder care, volunteer community service).**

**we require governments, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and, lending agencies to establish environmental audits with which every proposal must comply before implementation of loan.**

**we will endorse new principles of international law including strict liability for environmental harms and non-adversarial dispute resolution mechanism to compensate victims.**

*Robert B. Cooper*  
 ----- **LAND RIGHTS AND FOOD SECURITY**

**Aware that the gross inequities in land tenure and ownership are primary causes of social injustice, poverty of women and their children, homelessness and environmental degradation, and the dispossession of indigenous people,**

**Aware that land ownership and control is becoming increasing polarized,**

**Recognizing that current agricultural policies, in the North and in the South, are uprooting and displacing land-based communities, and are diverting land from food production to cash crops for exports, and**

**Recognizing that in many communities the nutrition of the family is dependent upon women's ability to produce family and domestic market food products, and that because women and children are a majority of the estimated one billion people in the world who go hungry every day, women's access to food and land tenure and ownership must be regarded as a basic human right.**

**we will call on the UN, governments and non-governmental organizations to cease discriminating practices which limit women's access to land and other resources, to increase allocation of resources which enhance food security and provide appropriate technologies which reduce women's work.**

**we will strive to create awareness about the environmental impact of land use technologies guided by immediate profit at the cost of the cost of long-term sustainability and productivity**

we will search for ways to strengthen agricultural research and indigenous foods and conservation of local crop varieties and

*Final*  
----- BIOTECHNOLOGY AND BIO-DIVERSITY

Concerned by the deterioration of habitats and eco-systems which are home to the billions of species with which we share the Earth and

realizing the tragic loss of species upon which our interdependent ecosystem depends

recognizing the treasure of plant and animal knowledge which is tended and passed on by the indigenous people of the world

knowing the attempt of commercial interests of the North to control the natural heritage of species of the South, through gene banks,

aware that genetically engineered organisms released into the environment pose a threat to bio-diversity

we insist that the UNCED Convention on Biological Diversity address the risks of biotechnology as well as the conservation of species

we call for immediate and direct regulation of research and development in biotechnology.

we recommend that the testing and release of organisms be done only in the country of origin, and that biotechnology products which are not yet approved or which are restricted in the country of origin be prohibited from sale elsewhere

we recommend that there be no patenting of life forms to protect against the commercial exploitation of the genetic resources of the South

we will work for a ban on bovine growth hormone (BGH) and a boycott of milk products with BGH.

we recommend that new technologies be approved not only on the basis of efficacy and safety, but also their social and economic impacts.

we demand that the risks of biotechnology be widely available in clear, layperson's language.

we will support indigenous people in their efforts to protect their natural environments.

*10/25 + Annual Report from*

----- INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Believing it is a basic human right to have access to unbiased information about the quality of the environment in which we live and

Recognizing the risk that the media may become dominated by forces which perpetuate a world view that ignores cultural diversity and integrity,

Believing that only through wide dissemination of information on environmental and developmental issues will we be able to confront the challenges of environmental decline,

Aware that information concerning the environmental and health impact of military and industrial by-products are often classified as secret for nation security or proprietary reason,

we invite the media to join with us in promoting the principles of this Action Agenda.

we demand that the United Nations monitor all activities of governments which threaten the environment including space and ocean probing and make information about such activities known to the world community

we will work to create and strengthen formal and informal information systems and exchange that adhere to the principles of openness and inclusiveness, giving voice to the majority of citizens, of reporting on violations of human and environmental rights

we recommend that all countries offer environmental education at the primary and secondary levels, including ecology. consumer education and permaculture.

we will promote environmental ethics education in our schools and in informal learning settings with the purpose of promoting harmony between all living systems and solidarity among peoples.

we will strongly support the establishment of a non-governmental organizations whose mandate and operation on environmental emergencies and environmental rights would be similar to those of Amnesty International.

----- WOMEN, MILITARISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Knowing that military expenditures, the arms trade and armed conflict deprive billions of human beings of basic security and



**well-being and**

Realizing the disastrous environmental impact of all military activity, including research, development, production of weaponry, testing, manoeuvres, presence of military bases, disposal of toxic materials, transport and resource use,

Aware that research on, and use of military weaponry including chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, contributes significantly to environmental degradation, genetic mutation, illness and death

Recognizing that militarism often leads to the occupation of lands and the denial of human and environmental rights

**we demand** nuclear weapons be dismantled and destroyed, that nuclear testing cease immediately

**we demand** that space activities and supersonic flight which threatens the ozone layer or releases carbon dioxide cease.

**we urge** an immediate 50% reduction in military spending .

**we demand** creation of national civilian commissions with 50% membership of women which would open to public scrutiny all military activities, expenditures, and research and development

**we demand** that national armies be converted into environmental protection corps which would monitor and repair damage to natural systems, including clean up of the military bases, and be available to assist citizens in times of natural and man-made disasters.

**we condemn** governments that turn their armies against their citizens, leading millions of individuals to become refugees and displaced persons

**we will educate** our daughters and sons to shun military service if it is in the service of governments which use military power to exploit the resources and people of other nations.

---- **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**Believing** that science and technology should be at the service of the many rather than for the profit of the few, and

Observing that, on the contrary, it is used to "harness" Nature, contributing to the degradation of eco-systems for short-term profit,

Witnessing the disempowerment of women through lack of access to appropriate and sustainable technology and the disregard for women's experiential knowledge because it is not considered





"scientific",

Aware that all too often women have been the victims of the misuse of scientific discoveries and inappropriate technologies,

we urge the marriage of ethical values with scientific investigation and use, and the development of criteria for all technologies concerning their appropriateness for both women and the environment.

We demand that all technology transfer should be appropriate and sustainable with special attention paid to long-term costs and benefits for people and the environment

we will support and promote communications strategies for disseminating information on appropriate and inappropriate technologies to women worldwide,

we will urge support for more women and girls to enter the scientific disciplines, including emerging environmental sciences.

We demand resources be made available for research and development of appropriate technologies and training for women.

we urge the UN and governments to create rural and urban training centers of excellence, North and South, which will serve to disseminate environmentally friendly technologies to women

## Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

### ----- CONSUMER ETHICS AND ACTION

Realizing that women's purchasing power is a powerful tool for holding the business community accountable for the environmentally-friendly quality of their products and behavior and

Knowing that women can organize swiftly to boycott products or businesses

We will boycott industries whose practices or products anywhere in the world are harmful to the environment or to health

we will promote recycling, reduce consumption of all forms and purchase only ecologically friendly products

we will engage in campaigns supporting investment in environmentally sound productive activities

we will reduce per capita energy use by promoting energy efficient technologies and research, development and funding of alternative energy sources

*Barbara*

--- NEW INSTITUTIONS

Realizing that there may be an attempt to create new institutions to manage the world's eco-system based on the current economic growth model and

Believing that those institutions might not have as primary objective the long term sustainability of the earth's species and eco-systems

Knowing that new institutions would be costly and that funds would be better spent in repairing damaged eco-systems and providing sustenance to those who live in them

we call for the creation of a Permanent UN Environmental Commission, to serve as ombudsperson, receive individual complaints, monitor compliance and enforce principles of an International Code of Environmental Ethics.

require all States and corporations who produce toxic chemical agents to dispose of their toxic wastes within their own borders

*Felice*

----- POPULATION, WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND HEALTH

We know that the major causes of environmental degradation are economic systems that exploit and misuse nature and people, pollutants and waste of industry and military technologies. We are outraged by the suggestion that women's fertility rates (euphemistically called population pressures) are to blame.

Unchallenged, this analysis lays the groundwork for the re-emergence of top-down, demographically driven population policies and programs which are deeply disrespectful of the basic human rights of women as guaranteed in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Also, knowing that the number of people plus their consumption of resources plus their waste determines their environmental impact, we recognize that a person in the industrialized world has far greater impact than a person living in a less wealthy nation, and

Aware that the right to reproductive health and choice is a basic human right of all individuals, we point out that the World Fertility Survey estimates that there are 500 million couples who wish to plan their family and who have no access to the means to do so, and

Fearful of the threat to women's lives by the HIV pandemic and,

Recognizing that women's ability to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases and to determine when-and-if to have children is a prerequisite for women's health, self-determination and empowerment,

**we condemn** any attempt to deprive women of reproductive freedom or the knowledge to exercise that freedom.

**we demand** women-centered, women-managed comprehensive reproductive healthcare and family planning, including the right to prenatal care, safe and legal voluntary contraceptives and abortion (fertility regulation).

**we urge** governments, multi-lateral and donor agencies to increase investments in comprehensive reproductive health services and to include men as beneficiaries of family planning education and services.

**we demand** that all governments systematically alert their citizens to the danger of AIDS and provide them with the information on how to avoid contamination.

Realizing that women and children are particularly vulnerable to cancer-causing toxic chemicals, radiation and nuclear wastes

**we demand** that research be undertaken on women's and children's susceptibility to cancer causing agents and that remedial action be taken to eliminate to such agents from all environments.

**we ask** the World Health Organization, International Labor Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization, national governments, public health groups and corporations increase efforts to eliminate environmental occupational hazards, in factories, offices and on the land.

-----  
**RECOMMENDATIONS TO AGENCIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS:**

Governments should increase their contribution to and support of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), which assists governments in their assessment of environmental quality or damage, undertakes studies, training and environmental major management tasks. Its budget should be considerably increased, to triple its current \$40 million.

We recommend the UNEP expands its efforts to benefit from the knowledge and experience of female staff members, consultants and its Senior Women's Advisory Group by actively pursuing a policy of gender balance in policy making.

Donor countries should increase their contributions to UNIFEM, the

only multi-lateral fund established specifically to increase the flow of development resources in women in low income countries, so as to reach a level of \$150 million annually by the year 2000. These funds are essential if UNIFEM is to enhance its catalytic role in providing resources and empowerment to poor women.

We urge all UN agencies to increase their commitment to integrating women's perspectives at all levels and in all programmes and policies.

-----  
 UNCED specific:

we will lobby our national governments to include women and representatives of indigenous peoples and grassroots organizations in their UNCED delegations

we will press all UNCED participants to discuss, adopt and implement our recommendations

we will distribute this Action Agenda widely to our governments, to non-governmental organizations, to multi-lateral agencies, business and industrial leaders and to the formal and informal networks we maintain and

we will make subsequent recommendations regarding governmental and non-governmental contributions to the UN Conference on Environment and Development

we call on world leaders attending the 1992 Earth Summit to sign a Global Climate Change Convention, with industrialized countries make a minimum commitment to a 20% reduction of carbon dioxide emission by the year 2000.

We submit these recommendations as a basic guide to our efforts to enhance environmental quality from now and into the 21st century.

-----  
 This is a compilation of the work, ideas, and values of 1500 women from around the world, North and South, East and West. It is representative of the essence of four days of workshop discussions which are distilled in this document. This document does not represent the views of each and every individual who participated in the process. It is meant as a challenge to ourselves in creating a safe and sustainable future.