

World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet

by Salma Ali

NATIONAL and international leaders are preparing for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Women constituting more than half the world's population should have an equal say in policies that will affect the future of our planet well into the 21st century. Negotiations and decisions on environmental protection and equitable economic development will be fruitless unless women's collective values, experience, knowledge and wisdom are taken into account. Women activists are working together to develop policy goals and actions for use in this decade and into the next century. To help women world-wide to participate in this process, the Women's International Policy Action Committee (IPAC) convened the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, 8-12 November 1991, in Miami, Florida, USA. Fifteen hundred women from around the world, North and South, East and West, attended the workshop discussions.

Programme and Action Agenda of the Congress: The Congress was held at Hyatt Regency Miami and James L. Knight Centre. The programme was divided into tribunals, workshops and dialogues. The Action Agenda prepared under following headlines are briefly described here.

Diversity and Solidarity. Recognising that nature is not limited by national sovereignty or boundaries and that environmental degradation is global, women must be given equal participation everywhere irrespective of culture, class, race, in public policy analysis, government decision-making, implementation, administration and funding at international, national and community levels.

Debt and Trade. In full knowledge that the industrialised nations have been the net beneficiaries of the exploitation of the rich resources of the South, concerned about the negative impact on the poor, especially women, of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank structural adjustment policies, immediate official debt forgiveness is demanded. Dismantling of all unfair protective trade measures used by the North against the South and total ban on the export of goods rejected for local consumption (or destruction) in or by the country of origin are called for.

Universal Code of Ethics. Recognising the current moral and ethical double standards applied to environment, development, women's participation and social justice throughout the world, it is necessary to adopt an International Code of

Environment Conduct for business and industry, for governments, for UN agencies and for NGOs which will include regulations on biotechnical genetic engineering. Demand is made for time use studies of women's work (household, cottage industries, subsistence agriculture, child care, elder care, volunteer community service).

Land Rights and Food Security. 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. The UN member states and NGOs are called 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.

Bio-technology and Biodiversity. Concerned by the deterioration of habitats and eco-systems which are home to the billions of species with which we share the Earth, it is insisted that the UNCED Convention of Biological Diversity address the risks of biotechnology as well as the conservation of species. It is recommended that the testing and release of organisms be done only in the country of origin, and that bio-technology products which are not yet approved or which are restricted in the country of origin be prohibited from sale elsewhere. Support is given to indigenous people in their efforts to protect their natural environments.

Information and Education. It is a basic human right to have access to unbiased information about the quality of the environment in which we live. But, for instance, information concerning the environmental and health impact of military and industrial by-products are often classified as secret for national security or proprietary reason. The media, therefore, is invited to join in promoting the principles of this Action Agenda and the UN should monitor all activities of governments which threaten the environment. All countries should offer environmental education at the primary and secondary levels.

Women, Militarism and the Environment. Military expenditures, the arms trade and armed conflict deprive billions of human beings of basic security and well-being. There is disastrous environmental impact of all military activity, including research, development, production of weaponry (including chemical, biological and nuclear

weapons), testing, manoeuvres, presence of military bases, disposal of toxic materials, transport and resource use. It is demanded that nuclear weapons be dismantled and destroyed, that nuclear testing cease immediately and an immediate 50 per cent reduction in military spending. Space activities and supersonic flight which threatens the ozone layer or releases carbon dioxide cease. Demand is made for creation of national civilian commissions with 50 per cent membership of women which would open to public scrutiny all military activities, expenditures, and research and development.

Science and technology. Science and technology should be at the service of the many rather than for the profit of the few and it is observed that, it is used to "harness" nature contributing to the degradation of eco-systems for short-term profit. Also witnessing the disempowerment of women through lack of access to appropriate and sustainable technology and the disregard for women's experimental knowledge. There should be 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.

Consumer Ethics and Action. Women's purchasing power is a powerful tool for holding the business community accountable for the environmentally friendly quality of their products and behaviour and would boycott industries whose practices or products anywhere in the world are harmful to the environment or to health.

New Institutions. A Permanent UN Environmental Commission should be created to serve as ombudsman, receive individual complaints, monitor compliance and enforce principles of an International Code of Environmental Ethics. All states and corporations who produce toxic chemical agents must dispose of their toxic wastes within their own borders.

Population, Women's Rights and Health. The major causes of environmental degradation are economic systems that exploit and misuse nature and people, pollutants and waste of industry and military technologies. It is outrageous to suggest that women's fertility rates (euphemistically called population pressure) are to blame. The right to reproductive health and choice is a basic human right of all individuals.

World Health Organization, International Labour Organiza-

tion, the Food and Agricultural Organization, national governments, public health groups and corporations should increase efforts to eliminate environmental occupational hazards, in factories, offices and on the land.

Recommendations to Agencies of UN:

1. Governments should increase their contribution to and support of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). Its budget should be considerably increased, to triple its current \$40 million.
2. It is recommended the UNEP expands its efforts to benefit from the knowledge and experience of women by activity pursuing a policy of gender balance in policy making.
3. Donor countries should increase their contributions to UNIFEM, the only multilateral 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.
4. All UN agencies are urged to increase their commitment to integrating women's perspectives at all levels and in all programmes and policies.

UNCED Specific:

1. Participants will lobby their national governments to include women and representatives of indigenous peoples and grassroots organisations in their UNCED delegations.
2. Participants will press all UNCED participants to discuss, adopt and implement the recommendations.
3. This Action Agenda will be widely distributed.
4. Participants call on world leaders attending the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development to sign a Global Climate Change Convention, with industrialised countries make a minimum commitment to a 20 per cent reduction of carbon dioxide emission by this year.

(The writer Ms Salma Ali is an advocate of the High Court and Supreme Court at Dhaka. She is a member of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association and Project Director of their Legal Representation Cell of Women Prisoner and Urban Legal Aid Clinic. She attended the World Women's Congress at Miami with assistance from NORAD.)

The People Force the Pace to Clean Up Karachi

by Ayesha Khan

KARACHI, commercial capital of Pakistan, has the unfortunate distinction of being one of Asia's dreaded mega-cities of the future. The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro warned about the growth of colossal urban centres in countries with high rural-urban migration rates and uneven development.

Even today Karachi can barely withstand its population — estimated at 10-12 million — and extreme pollution. How will it face the 21st Century with an anticipated 18 million residents?

The signs are that the people of Karachi are becoming practical about their problems and are prepared to solve them at the community level.

Forty per cent live in slum dwellings, with no civic amenities provided by the government. One such locality, Orangi, achieved world recognition for its sanitation and

Karachi. Most is dumped into Karachi harbour. A water sample sent for analysis to a laboratory in Britain was returned with the comment that this was not sea water, but sewage.

A group of citizens responded to this endless battle with pollution by forming Sherhi, an organisation to raise awareness.

Activist Navaid Hussain explains: "People have lost faith in the government, and political parties have failed the people. So you are bound to have this vacuum, with local communities and non-government organisations stepping in to fill it, because enough is enough."

The potential of public pressure to influence the authorities to take action is already apparent. Earlier this year, Sherhi published an article in its newsletter drawing attention to the pollution in

other environmental problems to court. If the case is won, he envisages a long-term project will be started with the Water and Sewage Management Board to clean up Karachi's waters.

Funding for such a project will be difficult to access in a country where money for development is already short. Hussain sees the Global Environment Facility proposed at Rio as a possible source of money.

Any efforts to resolve Karachi's environmental crisis come up against its formidable population growth rate of 6.7 per cent — twice the national average. As people from all over the country flock to the city in search of jobs, they strain resources and contribute to pollution.

Thus awareness-raising at

work are not ignored in this programme. They are reached through their existing NGO networks — for example, family planning programmes, community projects and adult basic education centres.

Arguably the most important development in Pakistan's fledgling environmental movement is that the NGO sector has helped the government to become aware of issues and plan a strategy to tackle them.

IUCN helped the federal government formulate a National Conservation Strategy (NCS). It has been approved at the political level and stands ready for implementation. Its goals are: conservation of natural resources, sustainable development and improved use and management of resources.

If the NCS is successfully implemented, Pakistan will be one of the few development countries to show such a long-term commitment to saving the environment.

The government's interest in environmental issues is viewed with some scepticism.

The 1983 Environmental Protection Ordinance set up an Environmental Protection Agency and a council, to be headed by the president. However, the Agency has minimal authority to see that the few environmental laws are implemented and the Council has met only twice since its inception.

Ayub Qutub, NCS co-ordinator, is confident that it will continue to draw on the expertise of professionals, local communities and NGOs who pooled their knowledge to help form the strategy.

He says: "The activists will have to continue to bring pressure to bear on government to take action on its commitments. They can act as role models and do environmental work themselves within limited resources at their disposal."

He estimates Pakistan will need to re-create 100 Orangi Pilot Projects right away to tackle urban sanitation. In fact, projects identified by the NCS need the co-operation of the private and NGO sectors as well as government departments, to succeed.

Akhtar Hameed Khan believes one of the most important achievements of the original project was to free the people from the immobilising myths of government promises.

The people of Karachi, accustomed to garbage heaps on street corners, regular cut-offs of water and electricity, and the socio-political problems of life in an over-populated city with not enough jobs, are cynical about the government's interest in helping them.

By developing platforms and groups to address environmental concerns of their own they may themselves decide who saves the environment in Pakistan and how. — Gemini News

Air pollution

The world's 18 most polluted cities:

Calcutta	Milan	Moscow
Jakarta	Mexico City	Bombay
Delhi	St Petersburg	Los Angeles
Tehran	Guangzhou	Bangkok
Beijing	Rome	Santiago
Shenyang	Seoul	Bangalore

Source: Population Crisis Committee

Scenic Highlands Scarred by Progress

PINE trees and mossy forests once stood on the 2,000-hectare watershed of Mt. Data in northern Philippines, but the saucer-shaped plateau has turned into a vegetable bowl.

About a dozen years ago, the mighty Chico river still roared in the valleys of the vast Cordillera range. But now little water is left, and most of it is either polluted or silted.

Home of the centuries-old rice terraces carved on the slopes of these northern highlands by the Igorot tribe, the Cordilleras have changed over time from scenic wonder to scarred land. Landslides and burned patches of forests look like wounds on the steep mountainsides.

Government officials point to earthquakes and typhoons for the ravages suffered by these slopes, but residents say the mining industry and the cash crop economy share much of the blame.

For centuries, tribal peoples of the Cordillera survived on upland agriculture and small-scale mining, their subsistence economy fully integrated into their culture.

The US colonisers introduced corporate mining in the mineral-rich region in the early 1900's, dislodging gold panners and pocket miners. Issuance of land titles and mining claims broke the system of communal ownership of resources practised by the tribes, who lost their ancestral domain.

In recent years, more and more villagers have become quite vocal against the ecological destruction wreaked by the mining industry that they say has brought soil erosion and depletion, pollution and loss of water resources.

Inside the tightly guarded Lepanto mines in Mankayan town, environmental activists point to used tailing dams that have collapsed, resembling grey canyons of mine wastes.

The Cordillera mountain range in northern Philippines used to boast of pine trees and a roaring river. But much of the mountainside has been stripped of forests to make way for the lucrative mining industry and a cash crop economy, both of which have also damaged the once mighty Chico river. Yasmin Arquiza reports.



merged arable land, is about 120 metres deep and is nearly filled to capacity, a company worker says. A fifth dam is in the works, he adds.

Local officials and residents also blame the company for the sinking of the town's high school building and some houses, allegedly caused by improper construction of mine tunnels.

At the Benguet Corporation's operations in Itogon village, residents have put up barricades to protest open pit mining. The practice involves scraping mountain slopes and removing precious topsoil.

But in ecologically sensitive areas like Mt. Data and Mt. Pulog, both designated national parks, environmental problems are largely caused not by big mining concerns but by the proliferation of vegetable farms there.

Both mountains are located

in Benguet province, a major source of vegetables for lowland markets. Here crops are rotated depending on the season, making vegetable production a year-round activity.

Vegetable farming has become the main livelihood of tribal peoples in the area. Environmentalists say this would not be a problem if only the farms did not take over dense woodlands serving as vital watersheds and harbouring unique wildlife.

This pattern persists despite the environmental costs because of continuing support from the government's highland agricultural development programme. Its projects include roads, seed storage plants, loans to cooperatives and supply of farm inputs like fertiliser.

The Cordillera Resource Centre (CRC), a non-governmental organisation, reports that 3,500 hectares out of Mt. Data's 5,513 hectares of original forest cover have since been replaced with vegetable farms.

To obtain high yields, vegetable farmers depend heavily on chemical herbicides, fungicides and fertilisers, which are carried downstream because of soil erosion. Farmers complain that the soil is also getting "stickier" due to chemical inputs, the CRC says.

The communist insurgency, which has a strong base here, has also taken its toll on the environment. DENR officers say the military burns down ambush sites and the periphery of rebel camps to prevent the guerrillas from using them.

Meanwhile, the rice terraces that have escaped being turned into vegetable gardens have fallen victim to the golden snail. Cultivation of the prolific snail, which nibbles newly-transplanted seedlings, was introduced in the 1980's to augment farmers' incomes and improve diets.

community development project.

The Orangi Pilot Project, led by Akhtar Hameed Khan, motivated residents of 50,000 households to identify and meet their needs themselves. They installed their own gutter-pipe sewage systems, built schools and health centres and planted trees in their barren neighbourhoods.

Recent studies have shown that there is virtually no clean drinking water supply in the city. Since 60 per cent of infant illnesses are caused by contaminated water, this environmental problem has become life-threatening.

Untreated sewage is another major cause of disease in

Karachi's coastal waters. The Supreme Court, under its review of human rights cases, took suo moto notice of the case.

The presidents of Karachi's two main industrial zones have been charged with dumping waste into the sea, which is already filled with the city sewage. These two zones alone discharge 615 and 550 tonnes of pollutants each per BOD/day into the city rivers (BOD means biological oxygen demand).

Shehri is serving as technical witness for the hearings, which should begin in the autumn. Navaid Hussain is optimistic that this case will serve as a precedent for bringing

all levels is a crucial component of any environmental programme. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) runs a public awareness and environmental education programme in co-operation with another non-governmental organisation (NGO), the Teacher's Resource Centre. It aims to teach school children to develop a "green" consciousness.

Sabiba Daudi, assistant education co-ordinator of IUCN, says Karachi is so heavily polluted many people already understand the problem. Education can help them feel there is a solution.

Most Karachi people outside the formal education net-

A City with Worse Environment

by Zamal Arsalan

CITIES have a population comprising both stable and floating inhabitants.

Some come for a while or stay on, others retire to the suburbs or the village home. Passing by or taking roots, these citizens give the city its character. If the city is large and prosperous, the restless and poor are drawn almost magnetically. Some do not like the hard labour of the rural countryside, or even the factories. Others are different kinds, of fugitives. These include the intelligentsia. Some inhabit the slums, becoming potential fodder for unrest when the city's or the country's law and order situation meanders into a bog.

"This is a story as old as that of the ancient city of Rome. In today's world, cities like Dhaka, need positive steps to be implemented to prevent the growth of slums. The Grameen Bank, rural electrification with consequent industries — usually small, occasionally medium — and the fact that radio and TV (colour too) have reached literally every village should enable the villagers to stay home I of course, shops with "consumer" goods found only in the city, and now most of the urban areas, are needed as well as adequate medical and educational facilities. Then only can cities and towns expect to be relieved of the pressure of external influx. Internal urban population boom can be checked as in the whole country by educating the mass, including the women. Education must stress 'home economics'

for the housewives, vocational and technical for the careerists with practically a moratorium on higher education. Training for the industries businesses and service sector is another must to ensure prosperity. Cities which adhere to these principles are better off than others (Singapore, Tokyo) but traffic snarls bedevil all but the most suburbanised of cities.

Our Dhaka city is in a sorry state. Surprising since we are a

even if the performer is absent in person. At any hectic bus terminal a part of the footpath is reserved for replies to the short call of nature. Traces of a watery fluid leave their imprint on the boundary wall as the performers stand while in the act! Beginning its journey here the rivulet can be seen going down to the edge of the footpath. The penetrating odour, when the breeze is in a teasing mood, testifies to the nature of the fluid.

At present in the first flush of dawn one will find the wayside drains and similar openings in the streets being used by the occasional squatter, according to the literal meaning of the word! answering 'the call of nature.'

green city, despite periodic maniacal urges for cutting down trees. Money is the excuse. But money is not a cure-all. A beautiful city has buildings to match. Dhaka has a past heritage and aesthetic creations from the present. A city full of happy memories is a blessing to the dwellers and the country also for such cities are always advocates of peace. All the lovely varieties of water fountains are not operating in our city to the disappointment of visitors.

At present in the first flush of dawn one will find the wayside drains and similar openings in the streets being used by the occasional squatter, according to the literal meaning of the word! answering 'the call of nature.' Remnants of the performance is often present,

These days the city boasts a number of public toilets. These are often one-shot affairs. Once they are built, that is it! No replacements. Mirrors vanish first, then wash basins suffer an equally mysterious fate. No detective work is possible as the door of the wash room now stays padlocked. Taps do not work. Pails appear and disappear as in a magic show. Tin drums take their places along with empty condensed milk tins and ovaline cans. Those in need of such services have increased in number. Agonised pleas to please hurry up can be heard from the helplessness in the queues to the queues to the fortunate ones in the lavatory.

In private offices which do not care, including business establishments, the situation is

A City with Worse Environment

just as appalling. Only respectable buildings, housing prosperous firms, fare better. Mothball are plentiful and air coolers hum busily. The latest elevators ask users not to panic. In case of power failure the automatic power will switch on carrying the lift to the next floor where the passengers may alight. This is welcome news to those who happen to be in urgent need of a visit to the toilet!

In public offices, a leaky tap generally ensures that when the need is acute, no water will be available. Paper and clay substitutes are employed by those facing the emergency. The absence of queues is replaced by a different malaise. Attempts are made to rectify this predicament by sticking legends on the lavatory wall imploring: "Please pull the chain before leaving." Although the pleas may be underlined, a number of people delight in refraining.

It is those who live in a city who give the city its distinctive colour, the civic authorities and the citizens have to play their reciprocal roles if the city is to have beauty and joy. Naturally, day to day trials and tragedies will be there. No city dweller is immortal, after all! If the city is to be beautiful, its inhabitants must feel the touch of such wondrous magic inside themselves. Once the process begins, it becomes a cycle. Emily Dickinson noted that a banquet is 'mean' unless one carries the mood of a 'feast' inside one, or 'The table is not laid without/ Till it is laid within'. — III