

FOCUS Women on the Move Beijing Conference Special

"Health Security Lies at Core of Women's Well-being"

ONE of WHO's leading messages at the United Nations IV World Conference on Women, is that health security lies at the core of women's physical and mental well-being. This concept was discussed in depth by world experts during the colloquium on women's health security, organized by WHO, last Tuesday.

According to WHO, health security covers the entire lifespan of women. It encompasses all aspects of the basic human right to health, including freedom of choice, personal security and reproductive and sexual health, the right to food in sufficient quantity and of good quality, the right to live and work in peaceful environments where known health risks are controlled, access to health services throughout the life cycle, and access to appropriate technology to assist women in carrying out their multiple roles. Without health security it will not be possible to achieve the development objectives being set by the Fourth World Conference on Women, WHO says.

Essential to the realization of health security is the provision of information and education. According to WHO, basic education and literacy must be tailored to allow women's intellectual development. This is the primary tool to enable them to understand their potential, as well as the environment in which they live, in order to protect their own health and that of

their families. WHO calls for an end to discrimination against girls in the area of education. Moreover, health education should be part of the school curriculum from an early age. It should include knowledge of the human body, of healthy lifestyles, as well as of disease sources, in order to teach young people to be active participants in safeguarding their own health.

Reproductive health is a crucial part of general health and therefore of health security for women. It is not only a key element of health during adolescence and adulthood, it also sets the stage for health beyond the reproductive years for both women and men, and has pronounced intergenerational effects. Reproductive health implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. It implies the right of access to appropriate information and services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth.

Health security also includes the provision of adequate nutrition. While an adequate nutritional intake is necessary for all people, it is especially critical for girls and women. An insufficient

food intake during childhood leads to an underweight, anaemic and growth-stunted adult woman, and can impair the health of future generations. Health security means addressing social, cultural, economic and legislative factors to permit girls and women to be equitably fed, and nutritional taboos to be dropped.

Freedom from all forms of violence against women is an essential component of

health security across the world. Women are exposed to a variety of abuses, ranging from domestic violence, including rape, to psychological exploitation, and violence associated with armed conflict and mass migration. Women suffering such abuse face physical injuries, psychological trauma, depression, substance addiction, suicide and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection. Even worse,

women who experience such violence often lack access to rehabilitative care insurance coverage, or compensation for their suffering.

WHO calls for governments and health planners to improve their response to the threat to women's physical and mental well-being by regarding violence as an important health issue. Women need access to a just legal apparatus, as well as to a responsive health care system capable of addressing cases of physical and psychological harm and its myriad consequences.

Working in environments free of health risks is also an important area of health security, women's gender-determined social and economic roles and their lack of education see them concentrated in specific working areas. Many of these are characterized by exposure to potential health hazards. In cities women are overwhelmingly found in the informal sector, or in small, under-regulated enterprise. In rural areas, they come into contact with pesticides and other toxins. Furthermore, whether in rural or urban areas, women are left with low-skilled, low-paid occupations. Many of these occupations entail exposure to carcinogenic chemicals, excessive noise, heat and humidity,

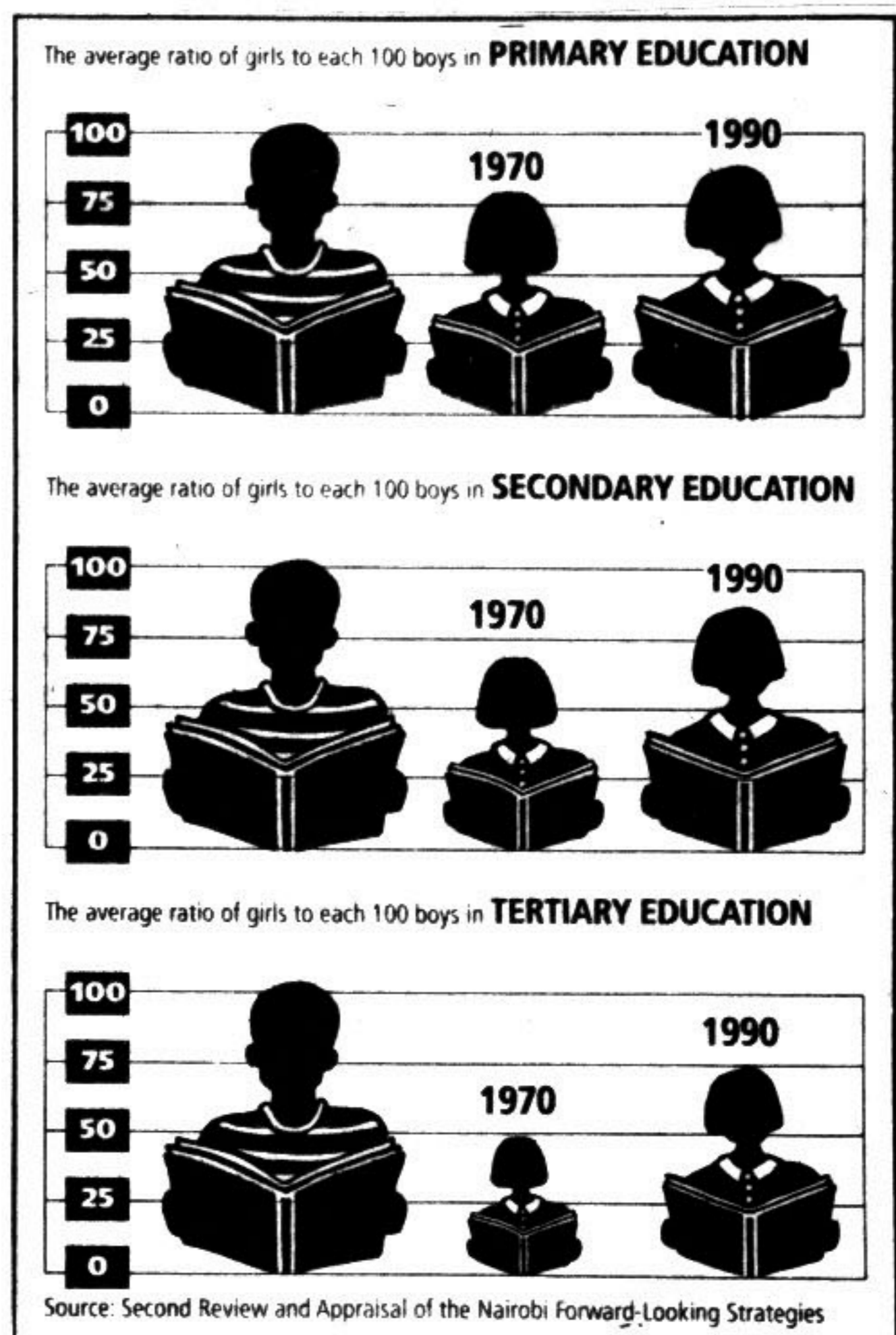
physical strain, eye fatigue and allergic reactions. In the worst cases, they are also exposed to reproductive health problems, and damage to the skin and the musculo-skeletal system. On many occasions their lack of authority and power in the work place subjects them to sexual harassment and its resulting complications.

WHO believes that only through health security can women have access to quality health care services, and be sure that their health needs will be met from birth to old age. This implies that women should be given easily accessible good quality health care services, especially at the peripheral level. Furthermore, full access to therapeutic treatment requires that the female population be included in research studies and clinical trials of new drugs, while the design and development of new medical technologies also must involve women in order to reflect their needs.

The WHO global commission on women's health has prepared a declaration calling for government action to sustain the realization of women's health security. This document, to be adopted at the United Nations IV World Conference on Women, sets goals and targets to improve women's health and enhance their education and access to quality care, as well as to assure that women attain the highest possible level of health.



Women's rights to the highest standard of health must be secured throughout their whole life cycle in equality with men.



Source: Second Review and Appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies

As a Girl She Fetched Water; Today, She Heads UN Conference

by Edith M Lederer

WAKE up at 4 am to fetch water. Wash dishes and shower. Run three kilometres (two miles) to school. Run home, peel potatoes and sweep the compound. Try to finish homework before the oil lamp splutters out.

That was Gertrude Mongella's life growing up on a tiny island in Tanzania in the 1950s, a routine still followed by millions of African girls — if they're lucky enough to go to school.

Now a politician, educator and international diplomat, Mongella has never forgotten what poverty and discrimination do to young girls. She has spent much of her life campaigning for equality of the sexes.

encouraged me to eat everything," Ukerewe in those days was full of oranges, pineapples, bananas, papayas and fish, so Mongella never experienced hunger. Her father, a carpenter, and her mother, a farmer, who still live on the island, worked hard to earn money to educate all four of their children.

"So I'm a lucky person — I grew up in a paradise," she says with a bubbly laugh.

From childhood, Mongella fought against barriers to women's advancement. She

train. You're so small and the train is so high."

At school, she excelled at drama, debating, drawing and painting. But she decided to be a teacher and went to University College in Dar es Salaam where she married in her third year.

"I really feel proud to be a teacher," she says. "I just love it. You can see the way you mold a person from nothing to something. It's a noble profession and actually teaching gives you a lot of skills which are needed for leadership. ... You learn the skills to manage people.

dependence struggle. She got involved in the women's movement, learning about herbal medicine and raising babies from the same down-to-earth women who had taught her about growing coffee and cotton in Ukerewe.

In 1975, while she was breast-feeding her third child, these women encouraged her to run for the East Africa Legislative Assembly. She won, becoming one of two women in the regional body.

All through these years, she worked in schools, eventually becoming an inspector. She also rose in the party hierarchy — and reared a family that eventually included four children.

In 1980, Mongella ran for parliament and held her seat until this year, when she stepped down to concentrate on the UN conference. She also resigned as Tanzania's ambassador to India.

"I didn't allow anybody to ignore me, because I know once you do, you will be a one-time politician," she says. "You must know your stuff. For women, you have to be two times better than a man. ... You can't get drunk and wobble around. ... You can't give anybody an excuse."

She remains a great admirer of Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's first president, who pushed her political career and remains a role model.

His successor, President Ali Hassan Mwinyi, put her in his Cabinet from 1985-91 and sent her to many international meetings on women's issues. At the last UN women's conference in Nairobi in 1985, she was vice-chairman.

A practicing Catholic, Mongella believes in family planning and was heavily criticized for pushing birth control in Tanzania. She said she is sickened by protracted debates on abortion because they focus on women's wombs, not their brains.

"That's why for me, decision making becomes a very crucial issue," she says. "If you can make a decision, you can make any decision ... about children, about work."



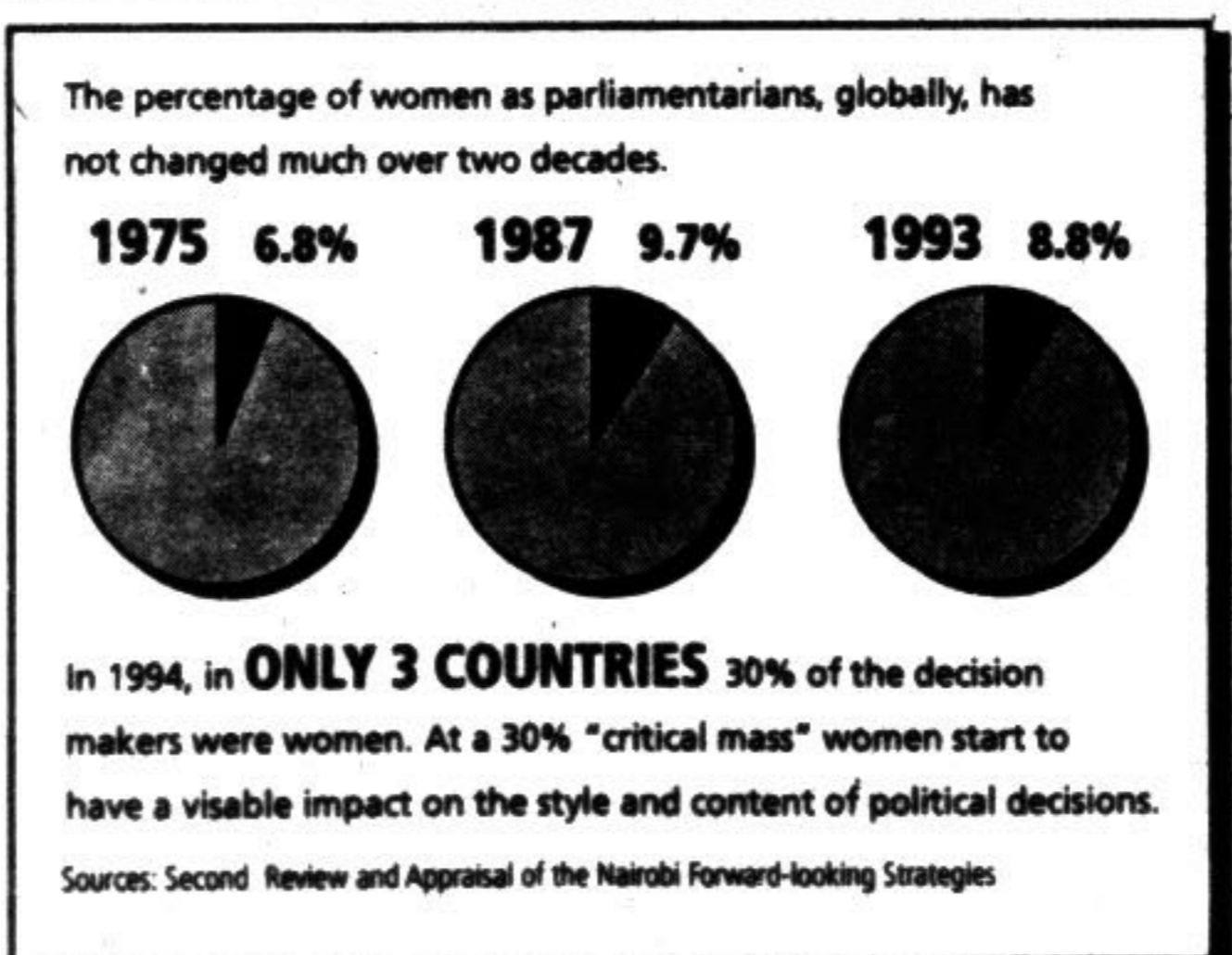
talked her way into a Catholic primary school, even though she was too young. She took a competitive exam and won a coveted place at Marion College, run by Maryknoll nuns.

"It was the first time I was getting out of the island, and my world was the island," she recalls. "I got on a small boat and crossed to Mwanza town and spent two nights and two days in the

While teaching, Mongella decided on the spur of the moment to contest an election for chairman of her school's branch of the ruling Revolutionary Party, Tanzania's only party. She won handily.

"That's how I got started in politics," she says.

At regional and national party meetings, Mongella listened to the politicians who helped in Tanzania's in-



Hillary Defends Women's Conference Against Conservative Critics

by Terence Hunt

HILLARY Rodham Clinton defended the international women's conference in China, saying conservative critics were unfairly portraying it as a gathering of "radicals and atheists bent on destroying our families."

The composition of our delegation refutes that charge, the first lady said last Sunday in her weekly newspaper column. "It is a broad based, family-oriented group committed to the mainstream agenda of the conference."

Conservatives have portrayed the conference as a radical, anti-family event that will endorse liberal stands on

issues such as abortion, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, seeking the Republican presidential nomination, has deemed it "misguided" and a "genuine waste of the taxpayers' money."

Mrs. Clinton issued her defense as she prepared to fly to Beijing to address the conference last Tuesday.

The first lady is expected to argue on women's behalf for adequate health care, political rights and economic opportunity.

"It saddens me that a historic event like this is being misconstrued by a small but

vocal band of critics trying to spread the notion that the UN gathering is really the work of radicals and atheists bent on destroying our families," Mrs. Clinton said in her newspaper column.

She noted that the 45-member US delegation of men and women includes a former Republican governor of New Jersey, Tom Kean, as well as an Ursuline nun, a nurse, a law professor and the editor of the Ladies Home Journal.

"Among the groups are mothers, fathers, Democrats, Republicans, liberals and conservatives," Mrs. Clinton said.

"The women's conference is about making the world a better place by helping women live up to their God-given potential at home, in school, on the job, in their communities and as mothers, wives, learners, workers and citizens," she said. "It is also the celebration of families, the bedrock of any society."

Before returning home, Mrs. Clinton will fly to Mongolia on Thursday for an overnight stay. Officials said the visit is intended to nurture a fledgling democracy in a nation sandwiched between Russia and China.



In many countries, the girl child is discriminated against from infancy through her childhood, and into adulthood.

Saudi Arabia

The Mufti of Saudi Arabia, the highest religious authority in the kingdom, last Sunday called for Muslims around the world to boycott the UN women's conference in Beijing.

Sheikh Abdallah Ibn Abdel Aziz Ibn Baz, in a message broadcast on state radio, appealed to Muslim Leaders "to take a united stand against this aggression that targets Muslims."

He charged that the Conference working document "contains resolutions contrary to Islam that encourage immoral and debased behaviour and seek to transform human societies into packs of animals."

Sheikh Abdallah added that the document also expresses "atheistic principles, such as one calling for the abrogation of laws making a distinction between men and women on the grounds that religion prevents equality between the sexes."

Saudi Arabia's most powerful religious body, the Council of the Grand Ulemas (teachers), also charged, in a statement issued Sunday, the working document authorizes "immoral acts," and aims to destroy family life.



Women in the Global Economy

Rapid influx of women into the paid labour force has been one of the greatest economic changes over the past decade. However, many of the jobs open to women are underpaid, poorly regulated and short-term.

Global Trends

Using international standards defining economic activity, the ILO counted 897 million women aged 15 and over as economically active in 1994. "It is estimated that women will make up more than half the labour force in most countries by the year 2000.

formal sector. Studies of major cities in Latin America and Africa indicate that 25-40% of the informal workforce is female.

"Over the past two decades, economic activity rates show increases for women in all regions except sub-Saharan Africa and eastern Asia, and all of the increases are large ones except in eastern Europe, central Asia and Oceania. By contrast, economic activity rates have declined for men everywhere except Central Asia.

Occupation Segregation

When women enter previously male occupations, the status of these occupations falls. A study in Europe found



Almost everywhere in the world, more women are working in the economy, but legal and customary barriers continue to limit women's access to land, natural resources, credit, technology and other means of production.

that in occupations where women were achieving high-level positions, there was a simultaneous downgrading of the occupations, pay, and status.

The Wage Gap

While advances have been made in wage equity over the past 40 years, most women still earn 50-80% of men's wages.

Wage segregation is par-

ticularly marked in developing countries with export-led industrialization. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, women in Latin America earn on average 44-77% of men's wages.

Studies show that wage regulation systems can narrow gender differences in pay.

The Draft Platform for Action proposes to:

- Enact and enforce legislation to guarantee the rights of women and men to equal pay and for equal work of equal value.
- Amend laws to ensure that financial institutions provide services to men and women on an equal basis.
- Give rural women equal access to and control over resources, land, credit, property rights, development programmes, and cooperative structures.
- Eliminate discrimination in the work place, especially on the basis of reproductive roles such as pregnancy or breastfeeding.

Iran

Iran added its voice to mounting religious criticism of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, accusing delegates of encouraging premarital sex. The official Iran news agency quoted First Deputy Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance, Hojatoleslam Mohammad Ali Taskhiri, as saying: "How can we tolerate young boys and girls being allowed to have sex without being married?"

"We, as Muslims, will resist anti-Islamic and anti-human measures adopted by the pro-Zionist elements at the women's conference," Taskhiri told the English-language daily Iran News, *Irna* reported.

Taskhiri left Tehran for Beijing last Sunday, *Irna* said. Conservative Christians and Muslims, including the Vatican and a number of Islamic states, oppose some of the language of a draft "Platform for Action" to be debated at the Conference, notably those parts dealing with contraception and abortion. Saudi Arabia's leading cleric, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bin Baz, has said Muslims should boycott proceedings because some items on the agenda were contrary to Islamic principles.

Egypt's Al-Azhar, one of the most prestigious seats for Islamic teachings has also criticised the event.