

From Rome to Manila: A new beginning for Isis International

The transfer of Isis International from Rome to Manila marks a new milestone in the organization's 16-year history. After several years of planning and preparation, the move to Asia, specifically Manila, is now a reality. From our new operations base, we hope to enable women to reach out to each other from far and wide -- East to West, South to North, East to East, South to South -- and share experiences with one another. To this effort, we declare our will and commitment to learn about and work for women's empowerment across classes, races, ethnicities, cultures and creeds.

We are happy that this publication of *Women in Action* coincides with the inaugural opening of our office and facilities at 85-A East Maya Street, Philamlife Homes, Quezon City, on the 18th of April, 1991. In this issue, we have focused on the activities of Isis International in Manila. To mark this historic occasion, we have included: a message from our sisters in Santiago; a letter from one of our founders, Marilee Karl, who continues to be based in Rome; and features on the Isis International team in Manila and the first formal computer training course held at our office.

While this issue introduces you to our new base and locus of operations, *Women in Action* continues to be a means of relaying information on the various activities of the women's groups all over the world. Therefore, we have our regular departments on conferences and networking groups. As soon as we receive all the documentation from Rome and you resume your communication with us, our next issues will become more comprehensive, covering women's activities and concerns the world over.

The Isis International Program in charge of preparing and publishing *Women in Action* is in the midst of conceptualizing a mechanism for international membership in the Editorial Board. This should further enable us to evolve a dynamic international perspective for the publication.

We know we have much to do and relocating in Manila provides us with a diversity of opportunities and dynamism for forward movement. We look forward to the vibrant inter-networking of our existing relationships and the nurturant development of new ones.

Mabuhay sa bawat isa at sa Isis International! (Long life to each of you and to Isis International.)

Letter from Santiago

April 8, 1991

Dear Friends,

We are very pleased and also very proud to be writing this letter for the first issue of *Women in Action* to be published out of our new office in Manila. Our plans and ideas for taking Isis International to Asia are finally becoming a reality.

The transfer from Rome to Manila reminds us of our move to Santiago. In 1984, two women who had been working at Isis in Rome returned to Santiago to open our center in Latin America. One of our first activities was the publication of *Women in Action* in Spanish.

We saw the opening of the Santiago office as the beginning of a process of decentralization through which we would have more direct contact with the many women and groups in the region who would become more involved in our programs and networking activities. By giving Latin American and Caribbean women access to needed information from other regions of the world, we are meeting our objective of promoting South-South communication and North-South linkage and solidarity.

Because the Santiago office proved to be a great success in this respect, we decided to go a step further and open an office in Asia.

With our offices in Santiago and Manila, we envision our work reaching out as busy fax machines receive many requests for information, hundreds of letters cross the oceans, and our resource centers grow with the materials sent by women and groups from Asia, Africa and Latin America; women linking up, collaborating, coordinating, learning from the differences and similarities of our analyses, organization and actions. There is much we can learn from each other and much we can achieve by coming together to develop appropriate analyses and strategies that will help break the isolation between women's groups at the international level, strengthening our movement and bringing about change.

In Santiago, we have very exciting plans for 1991. The first publication in the Women's Book Series this year will be on Women and Human Rights. This book will cover the discussion taking place within the women's movement that advocates viewing women's rights as human rights.

Big changes are also in store for the Spanish edition of *Women in Action*, which is being redesigned as an international women's magazine in response to the development and growth of the women's movement in Spanish-speaking countries and its new needs in terms of information.

Another major activity in Santiago will be the organization of the regional work meeting of the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network in October, which will be reviewing and planning strategies for developing the women's health movement in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Last but not least, we will be publishing another edition of our bilingual *Women's Data Base*, providing an ever-growing number of interested groups and organizations with access to relevant information in our bibliographic data base that will help them in developing their organization, programs and activities.

We invite all of you to participate actively, and communicate often with us. We want to hear about your activities, experiences, analyses, and above all, we want to receive your opinions about our work.

All of us in the Santiago office of Isis International send you our best wishes, confident that the new Manila office will revitalize our work and release new energy for strengthening and expanding our activities, bringing us closer to the people and share our resources.

Isis International
Santiago, Chile

To the Readers

8 March 1991

Dear Friends,

As one of the founders of Isis, I would like to take this opportunity to say how pleased and happy I am to see the opening of the new Isis International office in the Philippines.

This is a dream come true for us!

We have been planning and working towards the transfer of the Isis International activities from our Rome office to Asia for several years. It is wonderful to see our plans and our work bear fruit.

When we began Isis International in 1974, we dreamt of a network of women and women's groups and organizations stretching around the world, South and North, East and West, sharing ideas, experiences, models for organization and action, and building links of support and solidarity.

We were only a few then, with very limited material resources but a great deal of enthusiasm — and with the support, participation and contributions from women and groups in so many parts of the world, Isis began to grow and to take shape.

The opening of the Isis International office in the Philippines marks a new phase in our work. Looking back, there have been several other important milestones over the years.

One of these was when, in 1983, the original Isis, based at that time in Rome and Geneva, transformed itself into two separate organizations: Isis International in Rome and Isis-Wicce

(Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange) in Geneva. Today, Isis International and Isis-Wicce cooperate and network together, but we remain two separate organizations.

Another was in 1984, when Isis International opened a new office in Santiago, Chile in addition to our office in Rome. This led to the flourishing of Isis International activities in Latin America and to growing communication between women and groups in Latin America and in other parts of the world.

It was soon after that we began to think of moving the rest of our activities from Rome to a region in the South closer to where much of the Isis International networking is going on — among groups in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Latin America. And communication between women and groups in North and South can also be continued from the South.

We also looked at the collection of materials in our Resource Center, by now grown very large — magazines, booklets, studies and all sorts of things — so much of it from groups and organizations in the South. So often such collections end up in the major capitals of the North. Would it not be a symbolic step to transfer all these materials to the South? Where to move to was the difficult question. Which region, which country? There were so many choices. In the end, we had to make our decision on the basis of very practical criteria: where there were good possibilities to carry out international communication and information exchange.

Once the decision to move to the Philippines was made, we could not have been more delighted with the response and the enthusiasm with which the new Isis International team in the Philippines has taken up the challenge and has gone forward with opening the new office.

We would like to thank you in our network for your patience this past year. The transfer from Rome has taken a lot of our energy and has meant that some of our publications, activities and responses to your letters and requests have been delayed in 1990.

Now that we are settled in our new home in the Philippines, we mean to more than make up for it! The incorporation papers for the Isis International office were signed on 9 January 1991 and already we have a house and a new team taking up the work. And this first issue of *Women in Action 1991* has been prepared and produced by the new Isis International team in the Philippines.

The Isis International office in the Philippines will continue not only the publication of *Woman in Action*, but our other international networking activities with Asia and the Pacific, Africa, the Caribbean and the North, and together with the Isis International office in Santiago, Chile, with Latin America.

I would like to thank the new team in the Philippines for the wonderful spirit and energy they have shown in taking up the work, and I would also like to thank the Isis International team in Santiago and all our associates and

friends in so many places who helped make the dream of a new office in Asia possible.

As part of Isis International since its beginning, I have seen it grow and have had the good fortune to come to know many of you. I hope to keep my participation in Isis International and to keep in contact with you.

I will continue to work with Isis International and especially closely with the new office in the Philippines as one of its coordinators. Although our office in Rome is now closed I will continue to be based in Rome, at least for the time being, but I will be often in the Philippines, and I can be contacted through the Philippine office.

It is with a great sense of fulfillment and joy that I participate in the birth of this new phase of Isis International, and I am looking forward with optimism to what the future may bring.

Marilee Karl
Marilee Karl

THE MANILA TEAM

The word's out that Quezon City, one of the four cities of Metro Manila, is also the country's NGO capital. Non-governmental organizations have converted residences here into their offices. And with each other for virtual neighbors, networking has become a cinch. Rent is reasonable compared to Makati, the financial dis-



Nesting on East Maya Street

trict, where lease agreements can run up to tens of thousands of pesos a month.

After closing its office in Rome, Isis International moved to a three-room bungalow with an annex on East Maya Street in Philamlife Homes, a quiet, middle-class subdivision in Quezon City. There most of the 12 women have begun work since March long before the furniture arrived. The traditional womanly skill of making do was applied to the hilt — meetings were conducted on *banig* (native woven mats) laid out on the floor; boxes and upturned pails were used in lieu of absent chairs; human laps served as tables. And the 12 are managing with much grace and humor.

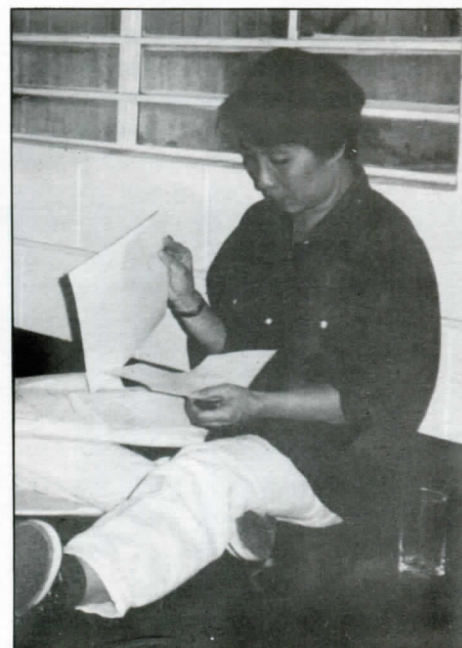


La Rainne Abad-Sarmiento, coordinator for administration and programs, is a University of the Philippines (BA in Philippine Studies and MA in Anthropology). For the last four years, she was the administrative officer of the Center for Women's Resources in Quezon City. She was also the secretariat coordinator of last year's Sixth International Women and Health Meeting, and she has a report on it in this issue of *Women in Action*.

La Rainne currently chairs the networking committee of WomanHealth Philippines and is the secretary-general of *Liga Filipina* (Filipina League). She is also a member of the women's political party *Kaiba* and *Gabriela*, a nationalist coalition of women's organizations.

Marilee Karl is the coordinator for international liaison and resource development, and continues to be based in Rome. Her fields of expertise are development and communication. After completing her MA at Columbia University in New York, she did advanced studies in development at the Netherlands Foundation for International Cooperation. She worked with IDOC, an international documentation and communication center for NGOs in Rome, Italy.

She was one of the founders of Isis in 1974 and since then has worked continuously with Isis in a coordinating role.



Lucia Pavia Ticzon serves as coordinator for organization development and planning. Since 1987, she has been director of the Women's Resource and Research Center (WRRC). She is a member of the editorial team of the Committee on Asian Women's Studies in Asia, chair-board member of the Alternative Economic Enterprises Systems (ALEE, Inc.), and international adviser of the Global Fund for Women.

An English literature graduate (*cum laude*) of Maryknoll College, Luchie is teaching contemporary literature at her alma mater's English department. She is also undertaking a straight doctoral program for organization and development at the Southeast Asian Interdisciplinary Development Institute (SAIDI).

Belinda U. Calaguas was the program manager of the People's Commission of the Institute of Popular Democracy before she assumed the post of Isis Resource Center and Information Program officer. She said that she sought the position "despite a satisfying job at the Institute." This move follows "the logic of her growing feminist consciousness."

Bel, who earned her BA in Journalism from the UP Institute of Mass Communication and has MA units in Women and Development from the UP College of Social Work and Community Development, feels that she can better contribute to the feminist movement if she remains "unidentified with any one politically-affiliated women's group. I believe Isis work will allow me this opportunity."



Elizabeth Reyes-Martinez, Communication and Network Program officer, thinks that joining Isis is "an excellent opportunity to work in a women's organization. In the past, I have always taken an interest in the women's movement and have read books on feminism, but somehow I never got the chance to work directly in a women's group."

Eliz has a BA in English from UP Diliman and an MA in English from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, and has served as writer, researcher and editor of various corporate and NGO publications. She is fluent in English, Filipino and Spanish.

Making up the core of associates for the different programs of Isis are: **Belinda Arcilla**; **Elvira C. Colobong** and **Judith T. Catubig**; administration; **Dominga B. Anosan**, health; **Cristina Bontuyan**, resource center; and **Elizabeth Lolarga** and **Barbara Goldoftas**, publications. **Arsenia D. Tan** is with general services.

Belyn, administrative program associate, is a registered nurse working in the spheres of children, health and human rights. Before joining Isis, she was the administrative officer of the El Taller Foundation in Spain.

She was the national coordinator of the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines from 1985 to 1989. After attending human rights courses in Strasbourg, Canada and Geneva, she conceptualized a human rights course for TFDP. This same course contributed to TFDP's garnering the honorable mention award for 1990 from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris.

The health networking associate, Doms, has been active for the past decade promoting primary health care in the northern region of the Cordilleras.

She noted that "like the women's movement, primary health care is a worldwide concern which aims to make health services available to all. Yet, despite efforts of governments and private agencies towards this end, the health status of majority of the people in the Third World have remained poor. More so with women.

Also a nursing graduate, she has served as a rural health educator of the Department of Health, a community-based health program worker, training coordinator and program director of the Community Health Education, Services and Training in the Cordillera Region.

Cristy, a biology graduate of the UP Los Banos, worked as project officer of MASIPAG (an acronym which in Filipino means "industrious" and standing for a group of farmers and scientists working for agricultural progress). This was a project that sought to develop alternative rice production systems.

Elvie is a certified public accountant who has worked for Genexco Philippines, Inc., Mabuhay Airways and the Rural Bank of San Agustin in Isabela. She can also operate a PABX switchboard, transmit messages through a telex machine and has a working knowledge of computers.

Judith worked as a data transcriber for POPCOM, a government agency, for seven years. Before joining Isis, she was with WomanHealth Philippines as clerk typist for its two important conferences: the Sixth International Women and Health Meeting and the First National Convention of NGOs for Health.

Babeth has lent her journalistic skills for this issue. She is the associate editor of *The Sunday Times Magazine*, weekend supplement of *The Manila Times*, and author of a book of poems, *The First Eye*.

Barbara, North American, studied botany at the University of Michigan and science journalism at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She is a freelance writer currently based in Manila. She has travelled to El Salvador to look on peace, development and women's efforts, and has won an award for her reportage.

Arse is a BS Commerce graduate, major in Accounting, from the University of Mindanao. She has had a varied working experience as a sales clerk, ticket seller and canteen operator.

The Isis Manila Board of Trustees will be featured in the next issue of Women in Action