

Happy birthday - 20 years well spent

The Leichhardt Women's Community Health Center in Sydney recently celebrated 20 years of providing innovative health services to women. With clinical services, counselling, health education and bilingual services, the Center was the

B i t s a n d P i e c e s

Child Brides in Canada

Our ISIS warning bells clanged when we read the following report in the June 1994 issue of **KINESIS**. Migration to first world countries has long been used as a mechanism for exploitation of women from the South by men from the North, this mechanism is now targeting particularly young and poor girls from the South, in this case for migration as child brides to Canada.

Women's groups in other northern countries, including Australia in the Asia-Pacific region, should be especially vigilant against such abuse. We wonder how it is possible for a 13 year old immigrant girl to become a bride in Canada where, legally, she is still a minor? What standards and whose standards are operating here?

KINESIS reports, 'A recent ruling in Montreal has left women's and immigrant's groups angry over the racist and sexist treatment by the courts of child brides in Canada. A judge in Montreal acquitted a 50-year-old-man, accused of assaulting his 13-year-old wife whom he sponsored for immigration from the Dominican Republic in early 1994. The girl, who fled the abusive relationship soon after arriving in Canada, was sheltered at the Secours aux Femmes, a shelter for immigrant women who are victims of abuse, she was the

first of its kind in Australia and has conducted campaigns on cervical cancer, migrant issues, sexual assault, HIV/AIDS, ageing and drug and alcohol abuse.

Leichhardt Women's Community Health Center, Inc., 55 Thornley Street, Leichhardt, Sydney, NSW Australia.

youngest resident at the shelter.

The court acquittal came in part because the judge questioned the girl's motives for marrying the man in the first place. Judge Joel Guberman agreed with lawyers for the accused who argued that the marriage was a ticket out of the Dominican Republic for the girl, which puts her 'credibility' into serious question.

A spokesperson for the Secours aux Femmes shelter, Marcia Aiquel, says shelter workers and residents are horrified at the judge's decision which means that "as a woman, the onus remains on you as the abused". Shelterworker Omaira Falcon adds, "...it is true that she married him in order to come to this country, [but] does that give him the right to rape...and sodomize her?"

Women's groups are concerned that this ruling will encourage more men to seek child brides from the developing world in return for immigration to Canada. In most cases, the girls are poor, are financially at the mercy of their husbands, know nothing of their rights in Canada and speak little or no English or French. Of the 78 women who stayed at Secours Aux Femmes in 1993, more than half were immigrants sponsored by their husbands.

Source: **KINESIS**, June 1994.
KINESIS #301-1720 Grant St.
Vancouver, BC V5L 2Y6, Canada.

Woman in Action

Dr Sima Samar, thirty-seven years old, is the 1994 recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership, the Award honours Asians who exemplify greatness of spirit, integrity and devotion to liberty. She works with her war devastated people in Afghanistan and the Afghan refugee community in Pakistan and was one of the first Hazari women to become a medical doctor. In 1984 she fled Afghanistan with her son when her husband was arrested, he has become one of Afghanistan's disappeared. Amongst other works, she actively supports literacy and livelihood education for women and girls and has established schools and hospitals. While she does not wear a veil and so arouses the ire of fundamentalists, she is a model of courage and independence for many women and girls, including Tamanna her three year old adopted daughter (Depthnews Women's Features, August 1994).

Woman in Action

Pakistan's prime minister Benazir Bhutto, the only Muslim woman leader to attend the ICPD in Cairo, who said 'Leaders are not elected to allow a narrow-minded minority to dictate an agenda of backwardness.'

Woman in Action



ISIS International is delighted that Noeleen Heyzer has taken up the position of Director of UNIFEM (the United Nations Development Fund for Women), Noeleen is a Board member of ISIS International-Manila

We wholeheartedly agree with the comments of the Administrator of the UNDP, James Speth, when announcing Noeleen's appointment, 'Ms. Heyzer is a highly regarded leader in the international women's community who will bring great strength to UNIFEM and to its mission of helping women around the world.'

Since 1984, Noeleen has headed the Gender and Development Programme of the Asian and Pacific Development Centre in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where her work has helped to build networks

of women's groups, to create credit and development programmes and establish training and research centres in Asia. She is a founding member of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), a network of women leaders from the South. With the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) NGO Regional Working Group, she played a leading role in preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Noeleen has authored or edited ten books and more than twenty articles and papers on development and women's issues, and has Ph.D and Masters degrees in Sociology. She took up the position as Director of UNIFEM on 15 October 1994.

Interview with Noeleen

Q: The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies are premised on the concept of a 'New International Economic Order', which, today, is characterized by the globalization of capital and trade, free markets, etc. How would you weigh the gains and losses for women within this development paradigm, given the trade-offs involved?

Noeleen: The Beijing Program of Action shall definitely be radically different from Nairobi. After 1985, we have seen how the over-emphasis on growth has created multiple crises. Since then, some rethinking has been undertaken and is still going on. Beijing shall be the product of this continuing process of rethinking and the emerging consensus is that it must be based on the concepts of sustainable development.

As for the gains and losses for women, in societies and countries where economic growth was invested in social development, where [gender] equitable structures were installed, and where the pattern and management of the growth process involved women, then women would obviously be

gainers even within this development framework. Otherwise...

Q: What has been the involvement of women in national planning and decision-making in the economic and political arenas? (In the Asia-Pacific regions)

Noeleen: First, let me emphasize the shift from micro/project level involvements of the past, yet, as we shift to macro-involvements, we see that after Nairobi the mechanisms for women to influence national development policies are very weak and lacking in resources.

Then again, we see that outside of government, many efforts of women have been successful. Maybe we can hit the right formula if we can forge partnerships with sympathetic government planners, researchers, etc. But in the end, the real measure of women's influence is when women's realities are made central to development policy.

Q: Major technological breakthroughs, especially in reproductive technologies have

occurred since 1985. The production and distribution of such technologies are market-driven and therefore controlled by corporate entities rather than governments. Does this imply a mandatory change in focus or targets for women (from states to corporations)?

Noeleen: Perhaps what we need to develop are not new targets for critique or intervention but new systems of accountability to which corporate entities can ultimately submit. After all, it is much more difficult to influence Big Business than states.

Q: Debates have emerged regarding the pre-eminence of growth over equity and growth versus sustainability.

How would you gauge women's participation in this debate?

A: Women have definitely participated in these debates but only those women who have access to networks, research and fora. There are still many unheard voices, and to avoid the creation of an 'alternative elite', grassroots women need to be incorporated into the whole process of articulating issues, new ways of formulating alternatives, etc.

Q: Do you think there is still space for women to critique the dominant development paradigm and to create an alternative one?

Noeleen: Yes, DAWN for one has been engaged in

development critique. Part of the process of creating such alternatives is for women to influence their own national agenda, and of course, participation in regional and international processes must increase.

Q: In the Draft Plan of Action for the Asia Pacific, it is stressed that NGOs and community-based organizations



'supplement state action at the local level in a more coordinated manner.' What are the prospects for such coordination given the divergences, tensions and conflicts between NGOs and governments?

A: There is a whole range of relations between NGOs and governments, from complete cooption to complete avoidance. I think the ideal, for more effective action, is collaboration, consensus and common grounds.

Sources: UNDP press release on the appointment of Noeleen Heyzer as UNIFEM head. Interview with Noeleen Heyzer, Djakarta, Indonesia, June 8, 1994.