

## Feedback on:

### HEARD IN A CONFERENCE:

**"WOMEN IN THE SOUTH HAVE MADE GAINS IN THEIR FIGHT FOR RIGHTS, EQUALITY. BUT WHEN THE LESBIAN MOVEMENT—WHICH IS MORE THREATENING TO MEN—ATTACHED ITSELF TO THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT—IT (THE LESBIAN MOVEMENT) ERODED THESE GAINS." DO YOU AGREE?**

**W**HAT DO I THINK? I think that statement is plain bullshit. But first things first, let me just preface my comments with a question. Whose mouth uttered this statement? Whose brain (or non-brain) thought this out? Was it a woman? Was it a man? Was it a "feminist"? Was it a heterosexual "feminist"? Was it a heterosexual non-feminist? It would be good to know WHO because then the statement can be put into its proper context. Of course, there is absolutely no excuse for homophobia—to whoever uttered this statement, be forewarned—this is just the beginning.

But let me get back to the statement.

1. "Women in the South have made gains in their fight for rights, equality."

May I ask, concretely what gains have been made? Since I am not directly in touch with the Women in the South (does this refer particularly to Mindanao?), let me just say that some news about women from that region have been quite disturbing. The complaint filed by rape survivor Karen Vertido was just thrown into the dustbin. The SPCPD has no major women players—it seems that everything is so male-driven and male-defined. Where is equality here? Come to think of it—is that also why the major oppositors are women? And that's not all. Now, Misuari has gone around town talking about women in a very despicable and abominable manner. His macho ego can't probably stand the idea of women standing up to him. Has

# f e e d b a c k

any woman (Muslim and others—with the exception of Daisy Fuentes) taken him into account for his sexist slurs?

But I digress.

2. "But when the lesbian movement—which is more threatening to men—attached itself to the women's movement..."

Hello? Hello? Didn't I just notice a gaping hole in that statement? The lesbian movement did not, factually speaking, attach itself to the women's movement. It WAS and IS part of the women's movement. Its existence is an integral part of the evolution and shifts in the women's movement. I think it has to be made clear to whoever made that statement that the women's movement here and abroad have had lesbians from the very beginning. In fact, a lot of the theoretical formulations and understanding of feminism could be credited to lesbian feminists.

3. "... (the lesbian movement) eroded these gains."

Unless lesbians have the equivalent collective force of lahar, they cannot be rightfully accused of eroding the so-called gains of the women's movement. I think the credit goes to all the bigots, the right-wing fundamentalists, the bible-fanatics and yes, the homophobes in our midst who continue to masquerade as feminists or women activists but who do not, for a moment's repose, realize how much hatred and loathing they constantly spew out in their statements.

Eroded these gains? Speak for yourself.

*Malu S. Marin, Can't Live In the Closet (CLIC), Inc., Philippines*

**P.S.** On the other hand, if this statement was uttered by somebody from the women's movement, then I think the women's movement is one of the most unsafe spaces for lesbians. And I mean it. I've seen more hostility from the women's movement (towards lesbians and particular lesbian groups) than from gay men. Not that I am completely gaga over coalitionist politics—this has its own problems too.

I'm talking here of hostile, vile, and malicious attitude and treatment from organizations who dare call

themselves feminists. Is this patriarchy running in our very own blood and bones? The sad thing is some of the viciousness come from lesbians themselves. Don't ask me why—until now, it floors me to no end.

Yes, Virginia, the women's movement is not a sanctuary. It is not immune from gunk and grime. I should know, I've been in the women's movement for EIGHT years now. This hypocrisy has got to stop before it gobbles us all.

**P.P.S.** There! if ye think it's too rabid and frothing in the mouth—you ain't seen nothing yet. Of course, I'm not discounting that the women's movement had a lot to do with the blossoming of the lesbian "movement". Nothing's perfect in this world, I suppose. And yes, there's more to life than this.

**H**ere's a birthday card that is printed in the Philippines and which gave me, a southern woman, great joy!

**FRONT:** "On your birthday I want you to know that if we were the last two women on earth and there was only one smart, funny, romantic, sexy man left..."

**INSIDE:** "He and I would have you over on a regular basis!"

*Gigi Francisco*

*The A-team, Philippines*

**I** sense some ambiguity in this comment. While the person talks about making gains in a "fight" for rights and equality, in the same breath, one senses a need not to antagonize the men in the process. So, is this person saying that the women's movement in the south must negate issues which may be potentially difficult for men to understand? Whose prerogative is it to define these issues for ALL WOMEN? Do the women of the south then need the approval of patriarchy to succeed in this fight?

This comment I think is a reflection of how difficult and deeply ingrained homophobia is in our system. This comment

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

**According to the Far Eastern Economic Review, July 4, 1996, Singaporean and Malaysian Executives state that sexual harassment is not a problem in their country. Is this true?**

**If you have questions you wish to raise, send them to us also and let's ask our readers:**

**"What do you think?"**

expresses concern and desire to ensure the success of the women's movement but with a rather simplistic analysis of how it can be sustained and achieved. Can we truly say that lesbian issues alone have eroded these so-called gains? I would be interested to know why and how it could have possibly eroded these gains. What gains are we talking about here anyway? Does this person even have an iota of understanding of lesbian issues to make such a sweeping comment?

The right to express sexuality, and its many facets is integral to any women's movement. It is basic. If we as women, cannot even control and claim our own sexuality, how can we even make a dent in the social structures that shackle our very existence? How can one or a few women claim "gains" when there are women being discriminated against on the basis of their "otherness" whether it be in terms of class, age or expressions of sexuality? Can we really speak of empowerment and liberation when we ourselves negate the experiences of other women? Can one really talk of gains when we cannot even transcend our own biases?

The lesbian movement did not attach itself to the women's movement. It has always been part of it. Everywhere you look within the movement, you can see,

read and touch it. It is that palpable. A woman's choice to engage in women-identified relationships or identify as a lesbian, does not lessen her commitment. In the same way, that a woman who identifies as heterosexual or engages in affirming heterosexual relationships does not become politically suspect. Until we learn to recognize and respect our diversity then the women's movement will itself erode the very gains that it has worked so hard to achieve.... with no help from us lesbians.

*Giney Villar*

*Coordinator, Womyn Supporting Womyn Committee  
Steering Committee Member, The First National Lesbian Rights Conference '96 (FNLRC '96)  
Philippines*

Dear friends at Isis,

Greetings from Sudan! I have been receiving your valuable publications. I hope your work with women is progressing well and that you keep in touch with me.

Since 1992, I have founded with another partner our own company. Here in Sudan we have few women entrepreneurs so we need all the support we can get to fight the customs and social barriers hinder women from entering the business field.

I would also be grateful if you can inform me about conferences on women in business and addresses of organizations in this field to diversify my experience and widen my network. Also I would like to continue receiving your publications. Thank you and I am anticipating your support. With best wishes.

*Zeinab Elasad*

*PO Box 10890, Khartoum, Sudan*

**Women in Action** with ISSN 101-5048 is published by Isis International-Manila, an international non-government women's organization, founded in 1974 to promote the empowerment of women through information sharing, communication and networking. Its network reaches over 50,000 individuals and organizations in 150 countries.

**Isis International-Manila** has sister offices in Santiago, Chile and in Kampala, Uganda is where the Isis' Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE) is located.

**Isis International-Manila** acknowledges the support and financial assistance of the following partner-donor organizations: National Council of Churches in Australia, Bilance (The Netherlands), Canadian International Development Agency (Canada), Christian Aid (UK), CIDA-ASEAN (Singapore), Commission on Interchurch Aid of the Netherlands Reformed Church, DANIDA (Denmark), Evangelisches Missionwerk (Germany), Ford Foundation (Philippines), Foundation for a Compassionate Society (USA), Global Fund for Women (USA), Global Ministries-The United Methodist Church (USA), ICCO (The Netherlands), the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (USA), OXFAM (UK and Ireland), The Minister for Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Netherlands, NORAD (Norway), Swedish International Development Authority (Sweden), UNIFEM (USA), Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (USA), World Association for Christian Communication (UK).

### **Isis International Advisory Council:**

Nigar Ahmad (Pakistan), Shamima Ali (Fiji), Millicent Aligaweesa (Uganda), Kamla Bhasin (India), Ximena Charnes (Chile), Foo Gaik Sim (Malaysia), Noleen Heyzer (Singapore), Helen Hill (Australia), Khushi Kabir (Bangladesh), Kumari Jayawardena (Sri Lanka), Mary John Mananzan, OSB (Philippines; Chairperson), Yayori Matsui (Japan), Ana Maria R. Nemenzo (Philippines, Trustee), Susanna Ounei-Small (New Caledonia), Siriporn Skrobaneek (Thailand), Marianita Villariba (Philippines; Executive Director-Isis International, Manila), Marilee Karl (USA; Founder and Honorary Chairperson).