

BIO-ETHICS AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

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All over the world today there is an awakening to the importance of ecological problems and their impact upon all individuals and their well-being. It is truly remarkable and symbolic that we meet on the eve of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, scheduled for June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This milestone meeting, the Earth Summit, is the first legally mandated global summit, which will bring together government level policy makers as well as grass-roots activists from virtually every country in the world. Women will be there too, and it is quite natural, because women are a vital link in protecting the environment and sustaining development. Women and the environment are truly partners in life. Their voices and their visions must be heard and heeded.

The close link women have with the environment helps explain the huge interest of women's non-governmental organizations in ecological activities. This was demonstrated again and organized with the help of the United Nations Global Assembly of Women on the Environment. The conference was held in Miami, Florida in November 1991. The Assembly was the first international gathering of women to discuss the environment. It drew over 500 participants from over 70 countries and was designed to demonstrate to the UN Conference that women, as a result of their experiences, roles and skills, have specific and valuable contributions to make towards the environment and development issues. The idea was emphasized by regional assemblies on 'Women and the Environment' held in Zimbabwe, Tunisia, Thailand, and Ecuador. The gatherings of European women illustrate the same. Women's contribution in achieving sustainable development will be made by their involvement in decision-making and the implementation of environmental programs at all levels.

In preparation for the Earth Summit, the recommendations of the Global Assembly of Women have been conveyed to the heads of United Nations agencies, Governments, and decision-makers. We hope that they will be taken into account during the work of the conference, and that the Earth Charter and Agenda 21, the main documents of the Summit, include both men and women in their rights and obligations.

We anticipate the result of the Environment Conference to show an increase in the number of women involved in the decision-making processes with regard to policies, programs, projects, and funding for the environment.

Therefore, the ecological problems call on women throughout the world to stand united. If we want to resolve them, if we intend to exert greater influence in environmental management, we must not view the world as North/South, East/West. We must view the world as an array of ecosystems, each with different capacities. The broadening of ideological frontiers and the end of the Cold War, helps us to see the world as unique and common. As Dr. Vlavianos-Arvanitis states: "bios recognizes no ideological or geographical boundaries, no East-West, North-South or developed-developing countries. Bios provides the unifying force for the harmonious coexistence of all forms of life."

The members of the Russian International Women's Center 'Women's Future' accept the bios theory, as developed by Dr. Vlavianos-Arvanitis, into our hopes and visions. We consider the bios-philosophy like our own, which helps us to believe in a better future for our country. As with other women's groups, we are also promoting environmental awareness. We participate in environmental movements, we protest against chemical, water and air pollution. One of our projects deals directly with helping the victims of Chernobyl.

We now face new dimensions of ecological problems, those which appear as a result of collapsing economic and social structures, as are now occurring in Eastern Europe, including the former Soviet Union. Most of these problems have a devastating effect on children. In some cities of Siberia, for example, human milk contains heavy metals. In Moscow, a daily litre of milk for pregnant and nursing mothers was reasonably priced and available. The same amount now costs more than the average daily wage.

With the cooperation of the Russian Academy of Management and the UN Information Center in Moscow, the IWC is planning an international seminar in October to draw the attention of the Russian people to the possible crisis. The problem of children's ecology will be on the agenda.

Environmental policy cannot be built by governments alone. It requires grass-roots support, and hundreds of women's groups are active. Some examples are: the League of Women Voters (USA) who are campaigning against water pollution; women leaders in Germany helping to establish the Green Party; and Worldwide, women dedicated to the environment. In 1985, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) established the Senior Women's Advisory Group on Sustainable Development. The International Women's Center tries to associate itself with all of these organisations, as well as to participate in the ecological programs of the international community.

The Russian example shows that environmental problems very often result from governmental control. These problems need non-

governmental interference, and sometimes, specifically women's vision. Cooperation on the environment would help ensure that we all have a hand in creating a better future, not only for one country or one region, but for all humanity.

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