

ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS AND WOMEN

YOUNG SOOK PARK DIRECTOR

KOREA INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY

Ten minutes is not a long time to talk about two grand issues, women and environmental politics. But I hope my short speech can pose a few questions and challenge some of our conventional wisdom.

Today, global environment is placed only next to the international security and the global economy on the priority list of international policy issues. This shows a stark contrast with the situation of a decade ago when environment was only a marginal issue. Now, we can hardly find any major international conference that turns a blind eye to the environmental issues. Especially when a conference involves women, it invariably deals with environment. Here, at the Global Summit of Women, we too have a panel on environmental issues. This is because women are, more than anything else, concerned and care about "life" itself.

Then, have we got an answer to the environmental problem after all these efforts? Yes. As individual, we ought to have less children, produce less goods useless and waste less, while governments should cooperate with one another to ease the North-South gap, and put a brake on environmental destruction by the transnational corporations. At the same time, international bodies should do something to bring the reckless arms race to an end and prevent wars. We can find detailed action plans for these objectives in various documents such as the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, signed in the UNCED in Brazil in 1992.

By now, we have quite a few of these declarations, but has the environmental situation go better during the 20 years between 1972 Stockholm Conference on human Environment and the UNCED in Brazil? The answer is a resounding No!

During those 12 days when unprecedented mammoth Earth Summit on Environment was going on. 3 million babies were added to the world population, 144 thousand barrels of oil was split on the ocean, 465 million pounds of waste was dumped, 312 thousand children starved to death, and 30 billion dollars was spent on defense. All these nonsense things are taking place right at this moment.

Why?

Why all these problems? The blame goes to everybody. Everybody has become a prisoner of "my country first" mentality so their own problems look bigger than anything else to their eyes. The only concern the industrialized countries of North have is to stick to their privileged standards of living, in which a mere 6% of the world's population consumes more than 40% of the total resources. In doing so, they are not taking their due responsibilities of providing financial aid and transferring technology to support efforts for "sustainable development" in the developing countries. In the mean time, developing countries of the South are all too willing to sacrifice the environment to ease their poverty and hunger.

We can see exactly the same attitude when we check what is missing in the agenda of Brazil Earth Summit. Fundamental issues that gravely affect global environment such as the regulation of transnational corporation, enforcement of the Rio agreement with clear targets and timetable, population explosion, reductions in military spending, preventing oil leaks, controlling nuclear wastes, were not dealt with in the Summit's agenda. What does this tell us?

It means either that each party agreed not to touch sensitive parts of the others' or that the voices of the strong overruled the others'. But the most of all, what it means is that there is no will to take Rio Agreement into action.

Alternatives

Alternative solutions can be found in the equal participation of women in the national and international decision-making bodies. I would say that women can play an important role in overcoming the global environmental crisis, since they remain an untapped resource with great

potential. After all, there is nothing much left to expect from men who are the major culprits of current problems.

Truly, we, women, know what the problem is and how serious it is. However, we do not have the power to take action. We do not have the power to make what we want to come true. We know what to do, but men decide "how to do things".

We have to worry about the basic things to start with. For example, women do not have any established way to have their voices heard by international organizations like the UN, and thereby affect the process of decision-making.

Do you know how many women were there among the 178 official delegations to the 92 Rio Summit? Only 10! We do not have to go further searching for another example of "unequal participation", when a conference hosted by the UN, an organization that endorsed equal participation for women in the Year of Women in 1975, acted like this.

In the UNCED in Brazil, celebrities helped women have their own voice get through. At the Global Forum, Shirley Maclaine, an American movie star, said the following: "The only way the objectives of the Earth Summit can truly be established is to develop the feminine values of love, compassion, honesty trust and the courage to speak from the heart, even when it threatens one's security. Additionally, if men could discover and develop their feminine side, the world be a much better place." In other words, she pointed out that the world needs feminine touch and called on women for their participation.

However, what we should not miss at this point is how women are seen and described in the UNCED documents. To put it briefly, these documents consider women as objects of education and enlightenment, or passive beneficiaries like youth and indigenous people. That is, women are consider no more than a major culprit of population explosion and passive producer of wastes. There isn't any difference between this and the Holy Bible written thousands of years ago, which put women in the same category as children as objects of protection.

The Chapter 24 of Agenda 21, Action for Women, gravely under-estimated the quality of woman by saying: "The world needs educated and aware women in order to achieve sustainable development." Again, in Chapter 5, which deals with population problem, women are described as the sole source of population explosion. It says that women should be given reproduction health care for responsible planning of family size. Without correcting these misconceptions about women by international organizations, the equal participation of women would be impossible.

What to do?

First, to equip ourselves with concrete Knowledge, we need to read and digest various documents produced by the UN and other environmental agencies, such as the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, and the Alternative Treaties (of NGOs).

Second, we have to come up with new strategies for women's equal participation. Consensus is not commitment. We need to take firm action. There are various sanctions on international trade to protect global environment. Why not mobilize a collective voice to call for international sanctions on discrimination against women?

Third, as we know, we women are the ones who should stand up and tell the truth. We are the ones who should come up with appropriate alternatives to the missing agendas of the Rio Summit. We cannot afford to compromise on the ways to save the future generations. Did you know that, every 5 hours, the military all over the world guzzles up an amount of money which is equal to the total spending on environmental protection for the last ten years? Yes, every 5 hours. And all this at a time when a war is no more a major threat to the mankind. And did you know how much pollution is produced by transnational corporations which covers a quarter of world trade? (figure) We cannot afford to sit down quietly, overlooking all these things happening. These are women's share in environmental politics.

Fourth, environmental issue is a political issue that needs political solution. In order to put environmental issue high on the political agenda, we have to mobilize great number of Green voters.

At this point, I'd like to bring up a few points to ponder on.

If our respective governments take a position that goes against environmental protection, what line would we take? When women leave the idea of global family for national interests, who would protect environment for our descendants?

Another thing I want to emphasize is the fact that we women have a choice. We ought to review our lifestyle and consumption pattern and make resolution to change them. We are all in the same boat. We share the same destiny. We must not use up resources which rightfully belong to our descendants.

In today's world, the power of the state is on the wane, while transnational corporations and organizations like GATT and NGO's exercise more control. If women of the world, half of the 5 billion world populations, such group will be stronger than the force which freed Nelson Mandela from the prison and tore down the Berlin Wall.

I'd like to quote Margaret Mead before I conclude my speech: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

I propose to you that we should become that small group of thoughtful and committed citizens.

Thank you.

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What could be the **Alternatives** ?

I think

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Helpless.

#at sustainable development
I should say men are the ones ~~should~~ need to be educated and aware.
They should learn from us women who live in a way most benign to environment.
Don't you agree with me?

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Could we expect from Beijing Conference?

Third, as we know, we women are the ones who should stand up and tell the truth. We are the ones who should come up with appropriate alternatives to the missing agendas of the Rio Summit. We cannot afford to compromise on the ways to save the future generations. **Did you know that**, every 5 hours, the military all over the world guzzles up an amount of money which is equal to the total spending on environmental protection for the last ten years? **Yes, every 5 hours.** And all this at a time when a war is no more a major threat to the mankind. **And did you know** how much pollution is produced by transnational corporations which covers a quarter of world trade? **(figure)** We cannot afford to sit down quietly overlooking all these things happening. These are women's share in environmental politics.

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Before I conclude /

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I'd like to quote Margaret Mead ^{to close} ~~before I conclude~~ my ^{Presentation} ~~speech~~: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." ^{She said}

I propose to you that we should become that small group of thoughtful and committed citizens.

Thank you. ^{for your attention.}

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