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FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN (TRANSVAAL REGION.)

P.O. Box 10876,
JOHANNESBURG.
January, 1956.

Dear Friends,

Ten years ago women from forty different countries met in Paris, and formed the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF).

The world had just emerged from a terrible war, and women everywhere were conscious of the urgent need to prevent such devastation and suffering ever happening again. The aims they set themselves were:-

- to destroy fascism
- to secure democracy and peace in the world
- to improve the status of women
- to pave the way for a happy future for generations to come.

The women took a solemn oath to fight for a happy future for their children, to wipe out fascism in all its forms so true democracy could be established throughout the world, to defend women's economic, political, legal and social rights, and to fight without respite to assure lasting world peace.

Today the WIDF unites 140 million women in 66 different countries.

From the time of its formation, the WIDF worked ceaselessly at its tasks. Those in the lead were keenly aware that they could not achieve their aims while millions in colonial countries endured exploitation, oppression and poverty. In June 1946, the WIDF resolved to make investigations into conditions in colonial countries, and in Prague in 1947 the Council of the WIDF passed a resolution on women in colonial and semi-colonial countries, part of which read:-

"The Council asks its national sections to express their profound solidarity with the democratic women's movements in colonial and semi-colonial countries, to help them in their fight for emancipation and their fight to win equal rights in all spheres, for the...construction of housing fit for human habitation, the creation of clinics, hospitals, in keeping with the needs of the population, schools for all children, regardless of race, religion, origin or sex, and the development and flowering of the national culture in the mother tongue.

"The Council asks the women of colonial and semi-colonial countries who are participating so courageously in the struggle of their countries for liberty, to support the united front of the movement for their country's emancipation, to take advantage of this struggle to win their own rights as women by preventing the exploitation of race, caste and religious prejudices which weaken the forces of the people in their fight for liberation."

A Conference for the Defence of Children (convened by the WIDF) in 1952 adopted an appeal, saying:-

"MOTHERS AND FATHERS OF THE WHOLE WORLD! LISTEN TO US!

Tens of millions of children, the most precious wealth of humanity, are today a prey to hunger, ignorance, fear and death.

Thousands of parents in Japan and in Syria are forced by poverty to sell their children; in countries such as India and Egypt, exceptionally rich in cotton, children have no clothes to wear throughout Africa, in Latin America and a large part of Asia, countries of immense natural wealth, millions and millions of children are without sufficient bread, shelter or care; more than half of them die before 2 - 3 years without becoming aware of what it means to be alive. Others will live in ignorance; in 1952 one-half of mankind is unable to read or write"

As the years went by, the WIDF constantly grew in strength, drawing together millions of women from different countries, all with a common purpose. The WIDF worked ceaselessly in the cause of peace, making a great contribution to the establishment and growth of the World Peace Movement; it sent commissions to different countries, issued pamphlets and magazines in many languages, helped women to establish and strengthen their organisations, and did everything possible to defend the rights of women and children everywhere.

In 1955 came the great World Congress of Mothers, attended by delegates from South Africa. More than a thousand women came from 66 countries, and a South African delegate presided at one of the sessions. This Congress declared:

"Let us bring up our children to love all peoples, and we will not allow the perversion of their minds by the cult of arrogance and the encouragement of racial hatred.

"All children, white, yellow or black, are equal, have the same rights and must be protected together ... Let our millions of hands stretch over the earth to clasp one another in friendship."

The influence of the WIDF has been felt in South Africa, and through its stimulus the first national conference of women of all races ever to be held in our country took place in 1954. The Federation of South African Women was formed at this Conference.

Women are today playing a more important role than ever before, both in our country and in the world as a whole. Women of South Africa made history when our Federation organised the magnificent Pretoria Protest last October. Now women of South Africa are faced with their greatest struggle - the struggle against the hated pass laws.

In fighting against passes for women, and for the rights of our children to proper and full education and care, our task is immeasurably strengthened by the support of women of other countries, through the WIDF. We are not fighting alone - 140 million women of 66 countries will watch us, support us, give us their encouragement. They know oppression in South Africa is a threat not only to all Africa, but to the world.

On this tenth anniversary of the WIDF, therefore, we ask you to inform your members of the WIDF and its activities. Pass this letter around to them. And we invite your organisation, and its members, to send messages of greeting to the WIDF. If you post your messages to the Federation of South African Women, Box 10876, Johannesburg, and we will forward them for you.

Yours fraternally,

(Mrs) H. Joseph,
Secretary, Transvaal Regional Cttee,
Federation of South African Women.

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