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Report of the first NATIONAL CONFERENCE of WOMEN

held in the Trades Hall, Johannesburg, South Africa
APRIL 17th 1954

Coming from many places, large and small, in different parts of South Africa, nearly 150 women attended the first national Conference of women, held in Johannesburg, to fight for women's rights and for full and equal citizenship for all.

The women had responded to an invitation sent to organisations and individuals to attend this Conference. The invitation was the result of the growing need that women felt for a different type of woman's organisation - one that would:

- embrace all women, irrespective of race, colour or nationality
- help to strengthen, build, and bring together in joint activity the various women's sections in the liberatory movements, and other women's organisations,
- participate in the struggles of the working and oppressed peoples for the removal of class and race discrimination, and for full and equal citizen rights,
- express the needs and aspirations of the housewives, wage-earners, peasants and professional women of South Africa,
- bring about the emancipation of women from the special disabilities suffered by them under laws, customs and conventions, and strive for a genuine South African democracy based on complete equality and friendship between men and women, and between each section.

While there are in South Africa many different women's organisations - religious, social, or political in character - there was no organisation of women that brought the many sections of women together with these aims. The existence of such women's organisations in other countries, and their co-operation on a world scale through the Women's International Democratic Federation, provided South Africans with inspiration and guidance.

Beginning in 1952, South African women in different towns began discussing the need for and possibilities of such an organisation, and by 1953 it was possible to call the women together at a National Conference.

Speaking in Zulu, Xosa, Sesutho, English and Afrikaans, delegates from all parts of the country welcomed the Conference with joyful enthusiasm, many declaring that they had long awaited such an event. With single-minded determination, the delegates resolved to establish the Federation of South African Women.

Bewysstuk No
Gekry by J. G. Plouffe
Deur A. S. & P. J. van der Merwe
Te. J. B. on 28/9/55
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This report is compiled from the minutes of that Conference, and contains extracts from the speeches, resolutions and the Charter adopted by the Conference.

The Headquarters of the F.S.A.W. is in Capetown, and all interested in working for the liberation of women in South Africa, should write to the Secretary, P.O. Box 2706, Cape Town.

OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE - Ray Alexander speaks on the Struggles of Women in S. Africa

Mrs. Ida Mntwana in the Chair called on Ray Alexander to open the Conference. Ray Alexander said:

On behalf of those women who helped to prepare this Conference, I bid you all welcome from the depths of my heart.

I greet you all, delegates and visitors who made this a great meeting, which will be of historical importance to our country and to our peoples' struggle for freedom.

All of us are here because we want to find solutions to the problems which mean so much to women: the winning of equality, democratic rights for women and our men, the right of our children to be brought up in decent homes, schools, and with opportunities for a full life.

Our sisters of Russia, Czechoslovakia, China and other countries have won freedom, independence and happiness. They are enjoying full equality with men in all spheres of economic, political, cultural and social life.

What is the position of the African, Coloured and Indian women of this country? They have no political rights, no right to elect or be elected on the governing bodies of the country.

The Government of our country represents a minority of the people. It is a government of Europeans only, and represents the interests of the landowners, mine-owners and factory-owners. To maintain power it makes laws discriminating against the great majority of the people; the African, Indian and Coloured people.

The Pass Laws, the Native Urban Areas Amendment Act with its vicious Section 10, have been responsible for filling up gaols - nine out of ten gaols in South Africa are overcrowded. Farm gaols are built and filled with men whose lives are wasted away to provide cheap labour for the farmers.

The Riotious Assemblies Act, the Suppression of Communism Act, the Criminal Laws Amendment Act, the Public Safety Act were introduced with the express aim of destroying the peoples' organisations and killing their desire for freedom in the country of their birth.

By means of a great mass of laws, to which new ones are added every year, the rulers of this country are trying desperately to prevent the advance of the people towards full citizenship. These laws divide them according to race; deny the majority freedom of movement, residence, ownership and education, and seek to keep the people in ignorance, poverty and submission, a source of cheap and unskilled labour.

The people will not become submissive slaves. The reply is to organise, men and women, young and old, in a united fight against unjust laws, and for security, peace, friendship and freedom.

In these struggles our women have played an important part. During the Defiance Campaign, hundreds went to gaol, some of them expectant mothers, some with their babies. Our women have come out on strike against the Coloured Voters' Bill, against the banning orders issued to Trade Union leaders under the Suppression of Communism Act.

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These struggles have produced many leaders, have made us feel the need for an organisation to embrace still wider sections of women and make them a great force in the struggle for freedom.

We have learned with great satisfaction and it has inspired us, of the wonderful work done by the Women's International Democratic Federation. It was formed in 1945, to organise and unite all women in defence of their political, economic, legal and social rights, and to ensure social progress for complete equality between men and women in all spheres.

All over the world women in Europe, in India, in the Middle East, in America, Australia, China, Africa, everywhere - have formed Women's organisations affiliated to the W.I.D.F., which now represents 140,000,000 women.

The women of the whole world, on whom falls the responsibility for the welfare of their homes, are growing more and more aware of the need to participate actively in the struggle for peace, national liberation, and friendship of all people, irrespective of race and colour.

In the last 10 years women in many countries have won democratic rights. We are all proud of the fact that Mrs. Pandit is the President of the United Nations, which shows the shallowness of race prejudice in South Africa where Indian, Coloured and African women do not have the right to vote or sit in Parliament.

Ray Alexander concluded her opening address with the stirring words of Beulah Richardson:

"Thrust forward in the fight for your rights!
Till the mountains of shame
see your people
till the cradle of your race
rejoice in the sea
till every woman everywhere
knows that it is to be
That in the will of the people

Greetings to the Conference and messages were received from the following:-

- WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION, Berlin.
- UNION OF FRENCH WOMEN, Paris.
- GERMAN DEMOCRATIC LEAGUE, Berlin.
- FREDA MATTHEWS, Fort Hare, S. Africa.
- AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, Mission Vale Branch
- AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, Local Women's Section, Alicedale, S.A.
- REV. AMEROSE O. SEHUME, Kimberley.
- WALTER SISULU, General Secretary, African National Congress.
- AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, Cape Town Headquarters.
- PHYLLIS ANSMAN, Cape Town.
- AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, Western Areas Women's Region.
- NANCY DICK, Cape Town
- NATAL PEACE COUNCIL.
- NATAL INDIAN YOUTH CONGRESS.
- IRENE BOKWE.
- WOMEN OF THE BANTU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.
- HEDAH MPOUMAMA, Fort Beaufort.
- FOOD, CANNING & ALLIED WORKERS' UNION
- NATIONAL UNION OF LAUNDRY, CLEANING & DYING WORKERS
- TRANSVAAL PEACE COUNCIL.
- S.A. LEAGUE OF DEMOCRATS.
- MARIE SIMON.
- J. M. SIMON & MIRIAM BODISIMBE, Durban.

and delegates brought greetings to the Conference from their organisations

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IDA MNTWANA SPEAKS OF THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN S. AFRICA
Mrs. Bertha Mkhize of Durban took the Chair, and called on Miss Ida Mntwana, President of the African National Congress (Transvaal) Women's Section. Miss Mntwana said:-

"We are gathered here today to lay the foundation for the future rôle that will be played by the women in the struggle for freedom. We must make women conscious that it cannot be successful without their active support. Our task is not an easy one, but we have achieved a certain amount of success, and we are proud to see that a great number of women are playing an important part in the struggle for liberation.

"Gone are the days when the place of women was in the kitchen and looking after the children. Today, they are marching side by side with men in the road to freedom. The large attendance at this Conference is a clear demonstration of the ground we have already covered. We have come together, women of all races, to co-ordinate our efforts into one great army capable of shaping the future destiny of our children, and to consolidate the efforts of members of various national groups."

Ida Mntwana spoke of the oppression and poverty brought about by the Government's apartheid policy, and how such Acts as the Bantu Education Act were becoming more and more the concern of women. "We cannot sit down and fold our arms," she said, "when attempts are being made to hold our progress and that of our children...If we do not fight now, it will be too late, and our children will curse us for our callousness."

She went on to say:-

"We know that as women we have many problems which hold us back from taking part fully in the struggle, and it is for precisely that purpose that we have come to break down these problems. Let us come out as a united force, let us take our place in the struggle for freedom. The success of this Congress will depend on what we are prepared to do outside this hall. ...The time will come when we will be proud of the acts of women. Let us united, let us go forward with courage and determination!"

INDIAN WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA - A report given by Mrs. Fatima Meer.

Speaking on the position of Indian Women in South Africa, Mrs. Fatima Meer of Durban said:

"Indian women in South Africa suffer from disabilities that arise from two sources: firstly, they suffer as non-Europeans, and secondly as members of a society which gives them very few rights.

... "The position of women in any society is only relative to the position of men. Where the men are free, the women are free too, and have the greatest amount of equality with men."

Mrs. Meer described how Indian women first came to South Africa, mostly under the Indentured Labour System to work in the sugar fields of Natal, from 1860 onwards. Like the men, they were spurred on by false promises of full citizenship after their period of Indentured Labour had ended, but they soon found this was not to be. Together with the men, they came under the Masters and Servants Act, had curfews imposed on them, and their rights whittled away to nothing. Indian women were denied citizenship rights, were not given the vote, and provincial barriers were put up to prevent free travel from one Province to another. A Poll Tax imposed on Indian women and men amounted to half a year's earnings on the sugar fields.

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POSITION OF INDIAN WOMEN (Continued)

"South Africa remembers and speaks of the movement which was set in force by Mahatma Ghandi", said Mrs. Meer, "his struggle for the rights of the Indian people in the line of Passive Resistance, and that it gathered momentum only when the Indian women came into the fight."

When the Marriage Law was passed in 1913, making Indian marriages null and void, women joined the march with Mahatma Ghandi.

In spite of this, the position of Indian women in society is very bad.

In the first place, her position is the same as that of any non-European woman in this country. Secondly, she suffers a great many disabilities within the Indian community itself, partly because of certain traditional Indian practices, and partly because of certain South African laws like the Immigrants' Regulation Act of 1913. This Act, which stopped all Indian immigrants to South Africa, prevented a South African Indian woman from being able to return to India, marry, and come back to South Africa with her husband. The Act also deprives a woman of her domicile rights in the Province of her birth, if she marries a man from another Province. If such a marriage ends, the children of the marriage must live in the father's Province, and the mother can never return to her own family with them, or must go without them.

Following the pattern of the old social life in traditional India, the Hindu woman is not allowed to remarry. Even if she does take to herself another man, it is not really a legal marriage that takes place. In any case, even if she were allowed to remarry, it is extremely difficult for her to find a suitable husband. Male dominance is so great that either she has to take an old man, or one with a lot of children. On the other hand, the man is allowed to take another wife, and put aside his old one. Even in a legal marriage it is easier for an Indian husband to divorce.

In the case of Moslem women, although theoretically she is allowed to divorce her husband, in practice she has no such right, but many are the instances where husbands have set their wives aside and taken other wives.

As a housewife, the Indian woman suffers from the deplorable society that denies the non-European people from progressing, economically or otherwise. 70% of Indians in and around Durban live below the breadline. Even if the entire family puts their efforts into the sugar fields, the earnings come to about £1.10.0 a month. They suffer acutely from housing shortages.

The Indian birthrate is about the highest in Durban, but this is a problem which we as women have to fight. No woman likes to be inflicted with continuous child bearing. Following the high birthrate there is a high infantile and maternity mortality rate.

There are not enough schools for Indian children, and the Education Department has built schools only to accommodate 25% of the Indian school children; today for every one child at school every other child is out of school.

Mrs Meer said that these are the broad facts of life which the Indian woman is faced with. She is trying to free herself. Although the percentage is very small, it is a significant fact that the number is there. Thus today, although there are only about 1,000 Indian women in industries and about 1,000 in domestic service, which is menial work with very low pay; about 460 women teachers, 30 in the medical, social welfare and nursing professions, the fact that from a society which was so terribly male dominated, these women could come out is an indication of their fight for emancipation. The Defiance Campaign and Passive Resistance have shown the part of Indian women in the fight for liberation.

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WOMEN OF NEW CHINA-

A report presented by Mr. Duma Nokwe.

Mr. Duma Nokwe, of the African National Congress Youth League (Transvaal) said that he had been asked to speak by Mr. Sisulu, Secretary-General of the African National Congress, who was unable to come himself.

"This is a historical Conference," he said, "and we have no doubt that the results of this Conference will influence the course of events in South Africa...The women's struggle is important in any country because the freedom of the women means the freedom of half the people of the world; secondly, their struggle reinforces the whole struggle against oppression."

Mr. Nokwe went on to speak of women of China, both of old China, and of new China, born in the Chinese Revolution five years ago.

The old China was a feudal and semi-colonial country, in which peasants suffered ruthless exploitation, the mass of women sharing this oppression with the men and also suffering double enslavement as women. They had absolutely no rights. The binding of their feet with cloth was a symbol of their subjection.

Women were inferiors, always paid less than men, regardless of the work they did. Women workers feared pregnancy, which meant the loss of their job. The suffering of women was so great that many were forced to sell their daughters into prostitution.

The women of China joined in the historic struggle to crush the feudal oppression and distinguished themselves by struggling shoulder to shoulder with their men in the Peoples' Liberation Army, and as guerilla fighters.

Today women are fully emancipated and enjoy equal rights with men. Since the Chinese Peoples' Government was established in 1949, it has passed various laws to protect women and children's welfare.

Occupying one of the highest positions in China, that of Vice-Chairman, is Madame Soong Ching-Ling, widow of Dr. Sun Yat-sen who was the founder of the Chinese National Democratic movement.

Many women work in government offices. Two women are vice-Presidents of the Peoples' Supreme Court in China, and many women are judges in the local courts.

Women in China today can do any work or take up any profession. Pregnancy no longer means unemployment, and every mother is given eight weeks maternity leave with full pay, together with free ante-natal and post-natal care for everyone, as well as crèches with trained nurses and doctors for the babies of mothers working in factories.

Education in China is free to all without discrimination of sex. In old China, most women were illiterate, yet today illiteracy is being abolished.

In the land reform, women received the same land as men, and they are demonstrating their ability in increasing and improving agricultural production. There are 4,000,000 women tractor drivers in new China.

The All China Democratic Women's Organisation with a membership of about 80,000,000, unites the women of China and joins them with the women of other countries in the world in the struggle for democracy and peace. The feet of the Chinese women are now unbound, and they are today marching along with their men to build a prosperous China!

Delegates came from Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, Kimberley, Durban, Bethel, Krugersdorp, and many other towns, near & far. Many delegates wore their national dress.

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WOMEN'S *Struggle for* PEACE

Speech by Hilda Watts

At the next session, Mrs. Josie Palmer was in the chair, and the speaker was Hilda Watts, on 'Women's Struggle for Peace.'

She spoke of the hydrogen bomb explosion, and its terrible results. This explosion was caused by a bomb six hundred times more powerful than that which destroyed Hiroshima, but the present series of experiments would end with the explosion of a bomb 2,400 times as powerful as the Hiroshima bomb.

"This is what modern war means," the speaker said, "not sending armies away to fight, but the destruction of our own homes and our own children." Professor Bleksley had said if an H-bomb were dropped on Johannesburg the radio-active dust could blow to isolated farms in the Free State, burning the people before they even knew what had happened or could obtain aid. 'The front line is where the wind blows.' We must think of modern war in these terms - in terms of weapons such as the terrible A- and H-bombs, the napalm bomb and germ warfare; in terms of destruction and waste - cities brought to ruins, lands laid to waste, and man's creations destroyed; in terms of suffering - of broken families, of human beings killed and maimed on a colossal scale, in terms of hunger, poverty and disease.

This was the 'hot' war, but the 'cold' war was costing the world a great deal, too, not only in money spent on weapons when the people needed homes and schools, but also in the distortion of lives. The children of America were being indoctrinated with sedition and the creed of killing. School children had 'atom bomb drills', and were given identity tags to wear in case their bodies were mutilated beyond recognition. Through the comics, television, radio and films they were being made immune to horror, taught that brutality is right and killing, war and violence inevitable. So the cold war was destroying human minds.

When war was actually fought, as in Korea, the end of the fighting left the people in misery and suffering, but with the problems over which the war had been fought still unsolved. The wars in Viet-nam and Kenya must be brought to an end. We must demand an end to the fighting, and that differences should be solved around the conference tables, however difficult or long the negotiations were.

She referred to the moving appeal of the Kikuyu women to the Queen. The campaign in Kenya was war, and war that concerned the people of South Africa very deeply.

Women of the world were playing a leading role in the struggle for peace. Hilda Watts referred to leading figures in the World Peace Movement such as Mme. Cotton, Anna Seghers, Mme. Andreou, Mme. Blume and others. Women bore children to bring them up in peace and happiness. South African women must play a more active part in the fight for peace. In our country, the struggle for democratic rights was closely bound up with the struggle for peace, for the right to live.

The speaker then read extracts from letters written by children all over the world, speaking of their dread of war, their desire for an end to wars, demanding that world leaders talk and talk until they see agree. She concluded: "Yes, we hear the cries of the children. We women will organize for peace. We know that nothing can stand in our way and are determined to build peace and happiness in our own country and throughout the world."

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THE VOICE of S. AFRICAN WOMEN

Extracts from speeches of the Delegates

At this stage, the Conference was thrown open for discussion from the floor. The first speaker was Henrietta Ostrich of the African Women's Association, Durban, who addressed the Conference in Zulu.

She said she had listened carefully to the speeches, and felt that everything was in the power of women, who must demonstrate their might to Verwoerd. In Durban, women were not only warriors, but campaigners determined to win. She spoke about passes for women, and how the women of Natal had so far resisted any threats to make them carry passes. She urged women not to be afraid.

Among the delegates who addressed the Conference were the following:

RUBINA MOOSA (Transvaal Indian Congress): This delegate spoke of the inspiration to fight that would come from this Congress. In other countries, women gave their lives for freedom. In France a young girl of 18, Raymonde Deane, had lain down on the railway tracks to stop ammunition trains going to Indo-China. Women in Indonesia lay in the streets to stop the armoured cars.

In South Africa, hundreds of women had gone to jail, shoulder to shoulder with the men. Here, too, there was Ray Alexander, who as a young girl had given her youth to the cause and sacrificed her whole life for the struggle. She concluded: "We will go forward to freedom in our lifetime!"

RICA HODGSON (S.A. Congress of Democrats, Johannesburg.): Spoke on the important rôle that women could play in the forthcoming Freedom Congress, the Congress of the Peoples, that would be held later this year. The four organisations - the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the South African Coloured Peoples' Organisation had met together and their National Executives were preparing plans for the Congress. Everyone in South Africa would be called on to participate. Women would be asked to give their time to go round the country organising. A call for freedom had

been prepared. The speaker read out the Call, which was to be ratified by the four organisations.

DORA TAMANE (Guardian Co-operative League, Cape Town.): In the Cape, the Council had brought passes to the women in a crooked way. No husband could bring his wife to the town without a pass. The delegate spoke of the hard conditions of women in the Cape. In many towns women had to pay 2d for a gallon of water. The mothers and children were hungry because there was not enough money to buy food. Mothers had to go to work and leave their children in the care of other children not much older - as a result many children fell ill.

She spoke of the work of the Guardian Savings Club, which had enrolled 10,000 members in five years. "Women must unite to get their own government!"

GLADYS SMITH (Housewives' League, Cape Town and S.A. C.P.O.):

Coloured women went through pain just as much as white women. She herself, through her life, could speak of the struggle and hunger and having no food for hungry children. European women had the vote, but the Coloured women did not. The Coloured vote in the Cape had diminished by 8,500, yet the Dons said they must be taken off the voter roll because they would swamp the white vote. He had condescended to offer four representa-

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THE VOICE OF SOUTH

AFRICAN WOMEN (Contd.)

in Parliament to the Coloureds on a separate roll. The Coloured people would not accept the sort of representation that had been sold to the African people.

A great responsibility rested on the shoulders of women to fight all unjust laws. Women must pledge themselves to unite more closely, to get the right to vote, to be educated, the right of freedom to speak.

LILLIAN NGOYI (African National Congress, Orlando.):

This delegate was applauded when she said that if it had not been for the husbands, who kept back many of the women, we would have had many more delegates at this Conference. The husbands talked of democracy, but did not practice it.

She referred to the Industrial Conciliations Act Amendment at present before Parliament. According to this Act, women in the Trade Unions were no longer to be regarded as "employees." If they were not employees, what were they? When the garments they worked on were sold in the shops, could you tell which was made by black hands and which by white hands?

At home, women did all the household duties, left their children with strangers while they went to work, and worked for employers, but when it came to wages, they were not "employees." Africans were considered "barbarians."

All people must fight together against oppressive laws, not only Africans.

Some women made excuses that they could not come forward because they were teachers or nurses, and might lose their jobs, or could not fight on religious grounds; but all mothers are human beings, and must be prepared to face death in the fight for rights for our children. We must fight ourselves. The Almighty won't do it for us. The history of 300 years had proved this.

She spoke of the struggle against the Western Areas Removal Scheme, where people

are to be forcibly removed from their homes with six or seven rooms, while thousands still lived in the Orlando shelters, where men had to hold a blanket in their teeth while they dressed to obtain privacy, as all were in one room together; where the latrines were open to the public, and children could see everything.

"The Union Buildings came from the sweat of our husbands who toil in the mines with their lamps and hammers. The gold is dug by the black hand, but it goes to the white hand."

Laws like the Native Settlement of Disputes Act affect all women, white as well as black. We must fight together, Europeans, Indians, Africans, Coloureds.

SISTER M.F. THOMPSON (African National Congress, Kimberley.):

She said she could not see enough nurses at this Conference - there were four, but there should be forty. She herself as a nurse in Kimberley could not tolerate the conditions of employment for non-Europeans by the Council, and now worked on her own, and did not need fear the Government.

HETTY DU PREEZ (Garment Workers' Union, No. 2 Branch.):

The delegate congratulated the stand taken by the African women and the Indian women, who were no longer 'purdah lilies.' She regretted that more Coloured women were not here in the forefront, for they had a bitter lesson to learn; too many of them were 'play whites,' and disregarded the struggles of the Africans, thinking their disabilities were not the same. Before the Native Settlement of Disputes Act the Coloureds had worked side by side with African women in the clothing factories, but now the African women were told they must form a separate organisation. Already employers were taking advantage of this, and African women were being dismissed. The Government is slashing the people - what are the women going to do about it?

She said it was time that husbands prepared food for the women when they, the

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THE VOICE OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN (Continued)

women, came from work, for the women are no longer their slaves. Non-European women
the vote, to put the right people in Parliament, to get nursing homes and crèches.
"Women of Africa, let us promise to stand together, to go forward."

NETTY MACLEOD (Cape Factory Workers' Committee, Cape Town), took over the chair. She
the Conference was the most inspiring gathering she had ever attended. The spirit of the
delegates gives us courage and determination to go forward side by side with our men to
win freedom in our lifetime.

MRS. FLORENCE MATOMELA (African National Congress, Port Elizabeth): Said she would like
to talk in English, but as she had never been to school, she must speak her own language.
This was the first time she had been to such a gathering, and she was happy to be there.
But it would bring tears to Dr. Malan, because he did not want the women of South Africa
to be united. We would be able to control our fathers' land, and to progress with our
children.

In Port Elizabeth the women had such things as never before - passes. But the women had
taken the passes and put them in a bag, and took them back to the Superintendent, saying:
"Take your rubbish." They would not carry passes. They would rather have gaol or death.
The police raid the children for passes, even children of 14 years. Children of other
lands can sit peacefully, but our children cannot. We are imprisoned without reason, but
we shall fight. Now the women will have an organisation that will fight with the African
National Congress against the Native Settlement of Disputes Act and other Acts.

"Our land was taken from us without reason, and if we ask for it, we are Communist."
Ray Alexander must come to Parliament because she understands our difficulties. If she
does not sit in Parliament, then Malan should not sit. Hardship teaches us to be wise, and we
shall fight till death. Malan should take a photo of the beautiful, determined African
women. We cannot surrender. "I say to you: 'Have courage. We will not retreat. We want
to go to war with Malan. We have no guns for our war, but we shall fight until he gives in.'"

The delegate said that when their car broke down on the way to the Conference (they
arrived late), they cried, because they thought they would not get there, but God brought
them there. Have courage, women of all nationalities of South Africa, she said. She con-
cluded by saying she had been asked by the chairman to speak for only three minutes, but
she was a Defier, and defied even the chair!

LOUISA MMTWANA (Nnyanga Vigilance Association): The delegate spoke of the difficulties in
Nnyanga, which is a small place with great difficulties. The officials send papers for
information about our husbands' income when they want to put up the rent, but they do not
ask for our expenses. She said she might find, when she gets back, that all her possessions
have been taken out of the location, as had happened to others who fought the
Superintendent. "It is good to be here, and see everyone co-operating. Before, when we
were oppressed, we did not co-operate."

CECILIA ROSIER (S.A. Congress of Democrats, Cape Town.): Irrespective of skin or economic
status, women are workers, and must fight for the right to live as South African citizens.
Women must lead the men in the fight against the Bantu Education Act, the Industrial
Conciliation Amendment Act, the Pass Laws and the Population Registration Act, which
affects Indian, Coloured and European men and women. We should be proud of the attendance
at this Conference - the next Conference of women will have five times the attendance of
today.

Others who addressed the Conference at this stage were: WINIFRED SIQVANE (Women's
Vigilance Committee, Langa, Cape.) ELIZABETH MAFEKING (African Food and Canning Workers')

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THE VOICE OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN (continued)

Union, Paarl Branch); MARTHA NGXESHA (African Food & Canning Workers' Union, East London.)

The following are extracts from a speech by Mrs. CECELLIA A.N. KUSE (Cradock), made on the evening of the Conference, due to lack of time during the day.

Mrs. Kuse said:

Franchise rights for African women are not a new idea. One hundred years ago, when the British Government took the Queenstown area and eventually the whole Tembuland Province, they did not overthrow a Tembu king, but a Tembu queen whose name was Nonesi, who ruled the Tembu tribe after the death of her husband King Ngubencuka, and after whom Queenstown was named.

There are similar remote cases of African queens that I know of in Gaikaland and Pondoland, who ruled their tribes before the arrival of white people in South Africa. Of course, this was not common practice, but a case of the survival of the fittest woman.

Now we African women are up in arms for want of full franchise rights once more; and we are determined to fight for them to the bitterest end. So did Queen Nonesi only one hundred years back. When the British tried to take her area she did not put up her hands, but fought desperately, she herself led her forces against British troops until the end of the war when she was captured and exiled.

Speaking of the immoral removal of the Western Areas, Mrs. Kuse said the Minister of Native Affairs and the Government were loudspeakers for the citizens, they had been given office by a vicious population. The fault lay with the European voters. She recalled that when the defenceless Abyssinians were killed by the Italians, the people of England were not prepared to come to their aid. But soon England herself suffered bomb-fire in the 2nd World War, and so they reaped what they had sowed. So, too, the citizens of Johannesburg will reap tragedy if they are not prepared to fight for those in the Western Areas.

On the question of financing African education, the speaker said she wondered that Europeans did not feel shame to want

more taxation from Africans for Bantu education. There has always been an understanding between every Union Government, the Chamber of Mines, Industries, Railways, and every employer of African labour, that an African must not receive full value of his labour. For nearly three hundred years the African has received at the most a quarter of his wage, thus three-quarters of our money has disappeared between the Government and the white employer.

On these lines I declare, said Mrs. Kuse, what everybody knows - that all Union Government money is African money! Therefore we expect the Government not to finance our education, but to give Africans free education. We are not asking for a favour, but demanding our money, for which we have

On the transfer of British Protectorates, Mrs. Kuse said that in 1910 the British government sold out the Cape Africans for nothing. And now we wonder if they are not going to sell out the Protectorates. The transfer question should wait until we get full franchise rights.

"DAUGHTERS OF AFRICA" DURBAN
A speech made in the evening by Mrs. Bertha Mkize of Durban was not available at the time of preparing this report. It will be added to the report later, if a copy is received.

The resolutions and Women's Charter (on following pages) were adopted unanimously by the Conference.

Delegates decided that headquarters of the Federation for the coming year would be in Cape Town.

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Women of Alicedale & Bluecliff Station WRITE TO THE CONFERENCE

The letters, from groups of women unable to send delegates to the Conference, were read out. The letters set out the problems of women in country districts.

FROM A.N.C. Bluecliff Station

Dear Friends,

Our difficulties in this place is first a 1/- per month boarding fee that has been imposed on our youths, boys and girls, and if they are unable to pay the fee, they are sent to jail.

Secondly when it is reaping time for oranges, we work with the men under the same conditions, from six in the morning until six at night, for which we receive only 2/- per head per day.

Thirdly, the wages we get under Dutch man's employment is 8/- to 10/- a month, under great difficulties.

Fourthly, during 1954 we have been stopped from getting water where we used to, and also prevented from getting fuel. We are worse off than people in jail, and we may be found dead at any moment, we are, dear friends, under such calamities in this place.

FROM ALICEDALE

The message from Alicedale women to the delegates is that our children are starving here. We are only allowed one gallon of water a day.

We are employed in European homes, where we have to do everything - cook-general and ironing, for only £1 a month. From that £1 you have to see to your food and general housekeeping, including rents, which have increased tremendously.

We have heard that the cost-of-living allowances have been increased in other places, but not here.

We have very much hope the Conference will be a great success.

Things are so hard with us here that it is even difficult to buy certain things from the shop, because they say these things have been reserved for the Europeans.

RESOLUTIONS

THE FOLLOWING ARE RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED

1) NATIVE LAND & TRUST ACT AMENDMENT BILL AND THE NATIVES RESETTLEMENT BILL

RESOLVED: That this Conference condemns the immoral and unjust principles contained in:

- a) The Natives Resettlement Bill, which seeks to deprive all Africans of freehold rights in urban areas; to remove many thousands from their homes; and to deny to Africans the right to become a permanent part of the urban population;
- b) The Native Land & Trust Act Amendment Bill, the provisions of which would cause misery to thousands of rural Africans, and which seeks to render over a million farm labourers homeless and landless, and to legalise slave labour.

This Conference...

RESOLUTIONS (Continued)

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This Conference urges the Government to withdraw these infamous Bill, as being in conflict with the basic human rights of all men and women to live freely, to work freely, and to own their own homes.

2) BANTU EDUCATION ACT.

RESOLVED: That this Conference condemns:

- a) The Bantu Education Act as a vicious attack on the development of the African people, which divides and restricts the education which is the right of all people, and thus seeks to depress the African people to a condition of perpetual serfdom.
- b) The move by the Government to control the education of half a million children in Mission schools by the forced sale or lease of school buildings against the threat of loss of subsidy.

3) SEPARATE REPRESENTATION OF VOTERS ACT.

RESOLVED: That this Conference opposes utterly the Separate Representation of Voters Bill, which seeks to deprive the Coloured people of democratic rights, by removing them from the Common Roll and substituting the limited and undemocratic form of representation to which the rights of African people have already been limited.

That this Conference urges that the franchise be extended to all men and women over eighteen years of age, irrespective of colour or race.

4) P E A C E

RESOLVED: That this first National Conference of Women delegates, representing 230,000 women, sends greetings to women throughout the world. We pledge ourselves to work with women everywhere for our rights as women, for protection of all children, for freedom for all human beings, for peace.

5) NATIVE LABOUR SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES ACT.

RESOLVED: That this Conference condemns the Native Labour Settlement of Disputes Act, and the Industrial Conciliation Bill, as slave labour laws, and undertakes to fight against these Acts.

6) K E N Y A

RESOLVED: That this Conference of 150 delegates, representing 230,000 people, protests against the brutal acts committed against the innocent women and children of Kenya. We demand the withdrawal of troops, and hands off Kenya!

7) FREEDOM CONGRESS.

RESOLVED: This National Conference of Women pledges its support for the Congress of the Peoples. It pledges to work actively to organise women on all walks of life, housewives, domestic workers, factory workers, women from the reserves and on the farms, to ensure that women shall be directly represented in the Congress.

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WOMEN'S CHARTER

PREAMBLE

We, the women of South Africa, wives and mothers, working women and housewives, Africans, Indians, European and Coloured, hereby declare our aim of striving for the removal of all laws, regulations, conventions and customs that discriminate against us as women, and that deprive us in any way of our inherent right to the advantages, responsibilities and opportunities that society offers to any one section of the population.

A SINGLE SOCIETY

We women do not form a society separate from the men. There is only one society, and it is made up of both women and men. As women we share the problems and anxieties of our men, and join hands with them to remove social evils and obstacles to progress.

Within this common society, however, are laws and practices that discriminate against women. While we struggle against the social evils that affect men and women alike, we are determined to struggle no less purposefully against the things that work to the disadvantage of our sex.

TEST OF CIVILISATION

The level of civilisation which any society has reached can be measured by the degree of freedom that its members enjoy. The status of women is a test of civilisation. Measure by that standard, South Africa must be considered low in the scale of civilised nations.

WOMEN'S LOT

We women share with our menfolk the cares and anxieties imposed by poverty and its evils. As wives and mothers, it falls upon us to make small wages stretch a long way. It is we who feel the cries of our children when they are hungry and sick. It is our lot to mend and care for homes that are too small, broken and dirty to be kept clean. We know the burden of looking after children and land when our husbands are away in the mines, on the farms, and in the towns earning our daily bread.

We know what it is to keep family life going in pondokkies and shanties, or in over-crowded one-room apartments. We know the bitterness of children taken to lawless ways, of daughters becoming unmarried mothers whilst still at school, of boys and girls growing up without education, training or jobs at a living wage.

POOR AND RICH

These are evils that need not exist. They exist because the society in which we live is divided into poor and rich, into non-European and European. They exist because there are privileges for the few, discrimination and harsh treatment for the many. We women have stood and will stand shoulder to shoulder with our menfolk in a common struggle against poverty, race and class discrimination, and the evils of the colour-bar.

NATIONAL LIBERATION

As members of the National Liberatory movements and Trade Unions, in and through our various organisations, we march forward with our men in the struggle for liberation and the defence of the working people. We pledge ourselves to keep high the banner of equality, fraternity and liberty. As women there rests upon us also the burden of removing from our society all the social differences developed in past times between men and women. We have the effect of keeping our sex in a position of inferiority and subordination.

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**EQUALITY
FOR
WOMEN**

We resolve to struggle for the removal of laws and customs that deny African women the right to own, inherit or alienate property. We resolve to work for a change in the laws of marriage such as are found amongst our African, Malay and Indian people, which have the effect of placing wives in the position of legal subjection to husbands, and giving husbands the power to dispose of wives' property and earnings, and dictate to them in all matters affecting them and their children.

We recognise that the women are treated as minors by these marriage and property laws because of ancient and revered traditions and customs which had their origin in the antiquity of the people and no doubt served purposes of great value in bygone times.

There was a time in the African society when every woman reaching marriageable stage was assured of a husband, home, land and security.

Then husbands and wives with their children belonged to families and clans that supplied most of their own material needs and were largely self-sufficient. Man and woman were partners in a compact and closely-integrated family unit.

**WOMEN
WHO
LABOUR**

Those conditions have gone. The tribal and kinship society to which they belonged has been destroyed as a result of the loss of tribal lands, migration of men away from their tribal home, the growth of towns and industries and the rise of a great body of wage-earners on farms and in the urban areas, who depend wholly or mainly on wages for a livelihood.

Thousands of African women, like Indian, Coloured and European women, are employed today in factories, homes, shops, offices; on farms and in professions as nurses, teachers and the like. As unmarried women, widows or divorcees they have to fend for themselves, often without the assistance of a male relative. Many of them are responsible not only for their own livelihood but also that of their children.

Large numbers of women today are in fact the sole breadwinners and heads of their families.

**FOREVER
MINORS**

Nevertheless, the laws and practices derived from an earlier and different state of society are still applied to them. They are responsible for their own person and their children. Yet the law seeks to enforce upon them the status of a minor.

Not only are African, Coloured and Indian women denied political rights, but they are also in many parts of the Union denied the same status as men in such matters as the right to enter into contracts, to own and dispose of property, and to exercise guardianship over their children.

**OBSTACLE
TO
PROGRESS**

The law has lagged behind the development of society: it no longer corresponds to the actual social and economic position of women. The law has become an obstacle to progress of the women, and therefore a brake on the whole of society.

This intolerable condition would not be allowed to continue were it not for the refusal of a large section of our menfolk to concede to us women the rights and privileges which they demand for themselves.

We shall teach the men that they cannot hope to liberate themselves from the evils of discrimination and prejudice as long as they fail to extend to women complete and unqualified equality in law and in practice.

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 We also recognise that large numbers of our womenfolk continue to be held by traditional practices and conventions, and fail to realise that these have become obsolete and a brake on progress. It is our duty and privilege to enlist all women in our struggle for emancipation and bring to them all realisation of the intimate relationship that exists between their status of inferiority as women and the inferior status to which their people are subjected by discriminatory laws and colour prejudices.

It is our intention to carry out a nation-wide programme of education that will bring home to the men and women of all national groups the realisation that freedom cannot be won for any one section or for the people as a whole as long as we women are kept in bondage.

We appeal to all progressive organisations, to members of the great National liberatory movements, to the trade unions and working class organisations, to the churches, educational and welfare organisations, to all progressive men and women who have the interests of the people at heart, to join with us in this great and noble endeavour.

OUR AIMS

We declare the following aims:-

This organisation is formed for the purpose of uniting women in common action for the removal of all political, legal, economic and social disabilities. We shall strive for women to obtain:

- 1) The right to vote and to be elected to all State bodies, without restriction or discrimination.
- 2) The right to full opportunities for employment with equal pay and possibilities of promotion in all spheres of work.
- 3) Equal rights with men in relation to property, marriage and children, and for the removal of all laws and customs that deny women such equal rights.
- 4) For the development of every child through free compulsory education for all; for the protection of mother and child through maternity homes, welfare clinics, crèches and nursery schools, in countryside and towns; through proper homes for all; and through the provision of water, light, transport, sanitation and other amenities of modern civilisation.
- 5) For the removal of all laws that restrict free movement, that prevent or hinder the right of free association and activity in democratic organisations, and the right to participate in the work of these organisations.
- 6) To build and strengthen women's sections in the National liberatory movements, the organisation of women in trade unions, and through the peoples' varied organisations.
- 7) To co-operate with all other organisations that have similar aims in South Africa as well as throughout the world.
- 8) To strive for permanent peace throughout the world.

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TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

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