

**MESSAGE
TO THE LEADERS**

of **THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND**
and the WORLD BANK

**2000 GOOD REASONS
TO CHANGE COURSE!**

WORLD MARCH OF WOMEN IN THE YEAR 2000

OCTOBER 2000
FOR THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND AND THE WORLD BANK:

2000 GOOD REASONS TO CHANGE COURSE!

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gentlemen, you are important decision-makers. As you have said yourselves, we are experiencing the shrinking of the planet and globalization of a massively changing economy (WB Web site). We do not, however, occupy the same place as you in this world, though it is our world as much as yours. Indeed, we are the ones who pay a heavy price for globalization and who are subjugated by your policies. Certainly we are not all experts on the IMF and the WB, but we are all experts in skewed development, from East to West and North to South. We are scientists of the other side of growth, and a globalization that daily subjects us, our children, families, communities, the whole planet, to upheaval and disastrous side effects, or what has been termed “added suffering.”

It is because we want to denounce this situation that we have requested to meet and share our demands with you. We want you to understand clearly and directly from us, our determination to achieve change through the strength of our mobilization. And we have not come alone! A vast women's movement has been forming throughout the world over the past several years, alongside other social movements, trade unions, NGOs, international solidarity organizations and other civil society groups who are protesting the current "disorder" in the world, who are refusing to live in societies dominated by the "law of the marketplace" and another “law” with consequences as heavy on women, the law of the patriarchy. Together, we are proposing concrete action and measures so that humankind can live in peace, justice and solidarity.

1.1. Who are we?

We are grassroots women, of all origins, nationalities and orientations (political, cultural, sexual, etc.) sharing two conditions in common: poverty and violence, these two scourges that are the shame of all civilizations, cultures, political regimes, and of the dominant economic system at the start of this new millennium. We are the World March of Women in the Year 2000, an autonomous women's movement comprised of women's groups, unions and social movements working independently of government control. While the March was initiated by the Fédération des femmes du Québec, it was quick to gather support and mobilize thousands of women throughout the world. At the moment we speak, over 6000 groups in 159 countries and territories are taking part in this action, in their own countries, regions and at the international level.

The World March of Women is an act of citizenship by thousands of women who:

- denounce* poverty and all forms of violence against women;
- demand* real change: equitable sharing of the wealth, respect for women's physical and mental integrity and equality between women and men;
- call on* political decision-makers at all levels to come up with more than promises—we want concrete action. . . now!

1.2. Combat the structural causes of poverty and violence against women

To be sure, we must denounce the vast scope, and the human, political and economic consequences of poverty and violence against women.

But we are determined above all to combat the structural, macro-political and macro-economic causes of these problems. We believe that the world today and the situation of women in particular, can be explained by the combined forces of two worldwide phenomena:

-the dominance of a single economic system throughout the planet: neo-liberal capitalism, a system governed by unbridled competition that strives for privatization, liberalization, and deregulation; a system that is entirely driven by the dictates of the market, where full enjoyment of basic human rights ranks below the laws of the marketplace, resulting in crushing social exclusion and threatening world peace and the future of the planet.

-the perpetuation of a social, political and economic system that oppresses women: patriarchy. It is a system that has persisted over thousands of years, at varying intensities and in different cultures. It is a system whose values, rules, standards and policies are based on the supposition that women are naturally inferior as human beings, and on the hierarchy of roles that societies define for men and women. This system enshrines male power and causes violence and exclusions that extend to globalization, thereby giving it a direction that is fundamentally sexist. ??

These two historical forces feed off each other and reinforce each other in order to maintain the vast majority of women in a situation characterized by cultural inferiority, social devaluation, economic marginalization, 'invisibility' of their existence and labour, and the marketing and commercialization of their bodies. In many countries all these situations closely resemble apartheid. These two historical forces also feed fundamentalism and conservatism of all types.

1.3 One message for both your institutions

We have decided to address this message to your two institutions simultaneously. It is not that we are unaware of the different goals, functions and structures of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Rather, when we think of your two institutions—twins by birth, objectives and decisional structures—we think of an old couple, with their differences certainly, but who have always walked hand in hand.

You operate behind closed doors, hidden from the eyes and criticism of the world's citizens. You belong to the same political, economic and cultural universe, that of hard-line neo-liberal capitalism. You are governed by the same leaders of the richest countries on the planet—this is well illustrated by your operations that are based on a system of assessed contribution. You regularly consult each other before approving loans. Last, your "new objective," the *Strategic Framework for Fighting Poverty*, calls for an even more developed partnership between your institutions. You are two separate institutions with the same political and economic objectives.

1.4. The reason for our meeting

More specifically, we want to talk with you about:

- the foundation of your overall political and economic objectives, that we believe contribute to the present disorder of the world and constitute an obstacle to women's self-determination and exercise of their fundamental rights. We are particularly struck by your obsessive determination to push countries into the capitalist, neo-liberal and sexist market economy, leaving no room for diversity or pluralism in models for growth and development.
- the public foreign debt of developing countries, that we consider to be illegitimate and the urgent cancellation of which constitutes one of the conditions for combating poverty;
- structural adjustment programs, the effects of which have been dramatic on generations of women, since the 1980s in particular;
- the gender perspective, the integration of which by the WB and particularly by the IMF, remains highly questionable, specifically at the macro-economic level.

The World March of Women, on each of these points, proposes substantial changes in course. These proposals constitute the last section of our letter, and will be the focus of our meeting together.

2. THE MAJOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC OBJECTIVES OF YOUR INSTITUTIONS: SOURCES OF DISORDER IN THE WORLD AND AN OBSTACLE FOR WOMEN

2.1 The disturbing trend of international "protection" systems

After the Second World War and its concentration camps, after de-colonization and even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we were momentarily hopeful that the international community, through the United Nations, would finally succeed in putting a definitive end to wars, occupations, torture, and to all forms of violence against women. After the multiple financial crises of the last century: from the Great Depression of the 1920s to the Asian, Mexican and Brazilian crises (to mention only a few), we dreamed of an end to the devouring greed of global predators who plunder with the impunity of dictators. We were sorely disillusioned!

We see that despite its aid and development programs—not to be underestimated—the UN has been prevented from fully exercising its mandate of conflict prevention and resolution and protection of fundamental human rights, and has thus been unable to contribute to combating and eliminating the growing gap between countries and citizens, between rich and poor and between women and men. Meanwhile, economic powerholders, freed of all restraint, act like veritable warlords, as if the entire planet were their own back yard.

And what are your institutions doing? In the international arena, they are leading players in setting the current course of the world. Your institutions possess greater power than the UN itself in the economic sphere, and promote neo-liberal policies everywhere, which are the main source of growing inequalities. Your institutions—far from resisting the steam-roller of today's unbridled globalization—are its accomplices and standard bearers. They contribute to the impoverishment of billions of people women in particular. You must therefore understand our chronic, profound and systematic doubt when it comes to more and more "politically correct" language that is being contradicted regularly by more and more economically "incorrect" policies.

2.2 Faith in neo-liberal capitalism

At the heart of the IMF's and WB's basic objectives is an almost religious belief in the superiority of capitalism, and the neo-liberal market or free trade as the only possible route to growth and development, and the only path for globalization (George and Sabelli, 1994). All your policies stem from this hypothesis: unrestrained liberalization and systematic privatization and deregulation. Based on this belief, you promise that the free market will automatically generate democracy and equal opportunity for all, echoing the prediction of the last director of the GATT in April 1994 in Marrakech, for whom there were "no losers, only winners" in the process of globalization.

As you know very well, neo-liberal capitalism has not come close to making good on its "promises." Recently, Copenhagen +5 reminded us that the commitments of states and the international community to reduce poverty were not respected either: the vast majority of humankind still lives in poverty, especially women and children; for women, the gaps are even more significant: they represent half of the world population and furnish 2/3 of the work hours, but earn only 1/10 of the world's income and own 1/100 of the world's wealth (Durrer, 1995).

2.3 Maintaining political power in the hands of the richest

The dominant economic system is based on an equally dominant political system, "liberal democracy," which, at the international level, concentrates political power in the hands of a small number of rich countries, and at the national level, in the hands of a minority of wealthy citizens. This so-called democracy not only condones, it causes numerous divisions (class, race, social, etc.) that are threatening to the international community. Another characteristic of this "democratic" system: massive exclusion of women from positions of power.

Your institutions are rooted in this political hegemony of the richest, and we consider your policies to be anti-democratic: unilateral imposition of conditions on developing countries, intervention in these countries' internal policies, alliances with corrupt regimes, capitalizing on the structural weakness of States to impose the neo-liberal market philosophy, resistance to the financial consolidation of civil society despite a public commitment to promoting it, etc.

This so-called democratic model contradicts the very basis of democracy that we believe in, characterized by participation, respect of fundamental human rights, the fair distribution of humanity's wealth, and equality between women and men.

2.4 Contradictory goals

You propose to simultaneously fight poverty and promote the market-based capitalist and neo-liberal economy. . IMF wants to "make the promotion of capital account liberalization one of its purposes "(IMF web site). For its part, the World Bank states that "the private sector is the engine of long-term growth;" it therefore wishes to help countries create a climate favourable to business, one that stimulates efficiency and competition and attracts private foreign capital. For this, strong policies are required that are aimed at correcting budgetary deficits, privatizing public enterprises, protecting property ownership rights, etc. These policies are supposed to strengthen the capacity of the state to assure efficient and high quality services! (WB, Web site)

We believe that these goals are incompatible with one another and that events have shown this to be true. Certainly, you agree that the economic system you advocate has had its failures, principal among them being that all around the globe, people are becoming poorer, while their societies become steadily richer! We must not go on as if the market, left to itself, would automatically generate equality and solidarity.

Your institutions are indeed experiencing enormous difficulty with this market: no one seems to be able to predict its fluctuations and movements that contradict classic liberal theory. Criticism, some of it coming from within your institutions has been severe (Stiglitz, 2000): bad macroeconomic advice, particularly in the Asian crisis, and wholesale promotion of the liberalization of capital movements, ignoring its role (in particular speculation and uncontrolled capital movements) in the Brazilian and Russian crises among others (Bread for the World, 2000) and in the globalization of poverty (Chossudovsky, 1997??).

Against the sacred image of the free market we must oppose the brutality of real events. For example, UNCTAD reports (including one on sub-Saharan Africa) show that African countries have not gained in any way during over ten years of structural adjustments, on the contrary: a decrease in household consumption and production by local producers for the domestic market, increased dependency for food, constant devaluation of products exported by Africa to the world market, and rising taxes for low-income groups (CADTM).

2.5. Targeting policies: a secular version of charity

Indeed, you have admitted that this brand of shock therapy has consequences, and the WB in particular claims to be concerned with "lessening the shock for the hundred developing and transitional economy countries as they enter the world economy" (Web site). You say yourself that economic reforms that are demanded or imposed "can be devastating for the poor and most vulnerable" and that it is important to set up programs "to protect the poor or prevent the most vulnerable from sinking into poverty." You are even willing to admit that State intervention may be needed, but only to make up for the market's failures.

The poor are not the only ones affected by your policies, but they have become the focus of all your attention, thus saving you from a fundamental review of your political and economic objectives. Because the free economy does generate a few "undesirable effects," you create programs for the most vulnerable! This is the secular version of charity. It is hard to be against policies that "target" the most vulnerable, such as the innumerable World Bank programs, particularly those directed at poor women. However, these programs continue to be subject to your economic reasoning (Joanny, 2000) that now prohibit any social measures from having universal application; they encourage—as if there was a need—the privatization of all services (health, education, water, electricity, housing, transportation, etc.) and the consequent exclusion and sweeping aside of billions of people, the majority of them women, to the margins of society.

Indeed, Indian women, among others (UNDP, 2000) have come out strongly with their criticism and denunciations: "targeted" programs; the lack of reliable statistics on which to base income and poverty lines; the fact that people earn income on an irregular, unpredictable basis, fluctuating from one day to the next, because they work mainly in the informal sector; the equally difficult and economically insecure situation of those who live slightly above the poverty line. Finally there is bureaucratic arbitrariness and corruption in the classification of the "most poor," etc., (Women Speak, 2000) not to mention the social stigmatization that accompanies any selective policy—that kills as much as hunger does.

We demand the opposite of "targetting": the application of universal rights (political, economic, social and cultural). Through legislation and policies that can benefit to everyone.

2.6. New line, same old practice

Naturally, you acknowledge your mistakes! In an interview with *Le Monde*, WB president James Wolfensohn commented, "I think our mistakes are a result of focussing too much on financial criteria in forming our analysis and crisis predictions. We must also take into account the social situation of a country, the provision of a social safety net, for example, that would attenuate the shock. Until now, debate has been reserved for finance ministers and financial institutions." (Wolfensohn, 1999) But who is paying the price of your "mistaken" conceptions and strategies? Who is living with the consequences? Is not the human impact of your policies as important to take into account as the ecological impact?

To be sure, a new language, and new objectives have appeared in recent years, in particular the decision to make combating poverty the principal focus of your intervention, combined with sustainable development, good government and participation of the civil society (WB, 2000). The World Bank's studies on poverty are impressive (WB, 2000) and your intentions no less admirable. The voices of the poor have in fact persuaded the president of the WB to press institutions to review their strategies and help the poor—or, more precisely, the "most poor"—help themselves. One could almost believe we were in the presence of an NGO activist! The recent summit meeting, Copenhagen +5, was the occasion for your institutions, with the UN and the OECD, to reaffirm that "poverty in all its forms is the greatest challenge to the international community." (UN, WB, IMF, OECD, 2000)

We can only be skeptical with regard to this new direction because structural adjustment policies, re-baptized "Strategic Frameworks for Fighting Poverty," remain essentially unchanged.

2.7 A new form of colonialism

We believe that the policies of the WB/IMF perpetuate old colonialist and imperialist policies by modernizing and reinforcing them. We are worried and angered by this impression of reliving the past! In the same way that the British destroyed the national textile industry in India and other countries of the "Dominion," your policies continue to kill off any local industry that does not fall in line with market liberalization. We know that women form the majority of the workforce in these industries. It is not surprising that your institutions are perceived to be the "new colonizers" of the 21st century and have generated resistance reminiscent of the anti-colonialist movements of the past.

We also know that your institutions maintain two standards in terms of subsidies of agricultural products or staples for the poor segments of the population—they are prohibited in countries under structural adjustment, and tolerated in richer countries. Even your own ideology of total market liberalization recognizes that some markets are more equal than others. The influence of the richer countries is also a form of colonialism. And your financial institutions' interventions with the "colonized" bring to mind the lofty intentions of the former colonizers and the moral rectitude of a lady benefactress!

3. WOMEN: THE SO-CALLED BIG "WINNERS" OF GLOBALIZATION

You affirm that women are the big "winners" of globalization: they have more access to jobs, salaries are going up, the wage gap between women and men is narrowing, women have more access to financial independence, and there is more sharing of domestic responsibilities.

But the experience of thousands of women involved in the World March of Women and numerous feminist analysis testify to the particularly virulent sexist consequences of globalization today, in particular the specific impact on women of the macro-economic policies advocated by your institutions (WMW 2000; CADTM, 1999; WEDO 1995; UNIFEM, 1999; Alternatives Sud, 1999, etc.):

- globalization is a paradoxical process: flourishing businesses are conducting massive layoffs, women are gaining paid work but in conditions reminiscent of the 19th century at the dawn of industrialization. Often, if women's situation seems to be improving, it is only because the situation of men is deteriorating! Indeed, in a 1995 report, the United Nations emphasized that while economic growth was certainly a necessary condition, it was not in itself sufficient to improve women's status and to eliminate poverty. The report further states that thanks to globalization and integration into the global market, women have had access to more jobs than men, but they are losers in terms of equal pay and job quality (UN, 1995).

-the general tendency of States to reduce their deficit and government expenditures because of direct pressure from the financial markets, transnational corporations, your institutions via structural adjustment programs, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) results in massive job losses in the public sector—especially in health and education—where working conditions are generally more egalitarian than in the private sector and—where women are the majority.

-the systematic privatization of sectors as essential as education and health shifts on to women's shoulders and their "invisible" and unpaid labour, tasks previously assumed by the State for the collective good. Besides the privatization of access to health care and education, recognized as fundamental rights in international law, we are witnessing a veritable shifting of roles and responsibilities held by the State to the private domain and therefore to women. The transfer of roles results in a crisis of overwork for women. In fact, in Latin America, it is estimated that since the arrival of structural adjustment programs during the 1980s, women work one hour more per day on average, or the equivalent of an extra day per week, which is enormous (Madörin, 2000).

-we know also that two thirds of the world's children who do not attend school are girls, their families privileging boys when they have little money for their children's education. Even if the education gap for primary and secondary school age children is diminishing, progress is not fast enough to allow for this difference to be completely eliminated between now and 2005 (UN, OECD, WB, IMF, 2000).

-globalization exacerbates the crisis in women's unpaid work in a context where they are already overworked. This kind of work has clearly always existed, but according to some feminists, international institutions like the World Bank, through "mutual aid" and food aid projects, are also now dictating women's unpaid work, in addition to husbands, fathers, employers and governments (Madörin, 2000).

-in countries of the South, dramatic liberalization of the economy, accompanied by compulsory and unconditional opening of markets to products imported from industrialized countries (who, moreover, continue to practice various forms of protectionism) has literally wiped out subsistence agriculture, most often practiced by women. In India, for example, this situation, combined with inflated prices of food staples and the dismantling of the publicly subsidized food distribution system, has jeopardized the food security of millions of people. Women manage the family budget and prepare the food. They also eat less—because they eat what is left over, according to the distribution of roles within the family. If we add to this a rise in the cost of drugs, and health services that have become inaccessible for the majority of people, we can conclude that Indian women's health has deteriorated over the past decade. (Moghe 2000)

-also, in many countries of the South (Guillen, Martinez, WM 2000), women are the majority of those who work in free trade zones where wages and working conditions are not far from slavery. Doctors in the Dominican Republic have revealed that women working in export production zones experience twice the number of miscarriages as women working elsewhere; there are two times more under weight babies and three times more children suffering birth defects (Wichterich, 1999). The general trend towards deregulation—

consisting of regulations to promote transnational corporations—is the harbinger of a future where entire countries will be transformed into free trade zones.

-globalization profoundly transforms women's work in two ways. First, by the constant expansion of the informal sector where women form the majority. It is a sector without rights and without voice, where even demands concerning the application of social standards do not reach the women in question. Second, by the introduction into the formal sector of practices traditionally associated with the informal sector and qualified as the "feminine model"—practices likely to increase the competitiveness of businesses, such as total flexibility, atypical work, very part-time and fragmented schedules, on-call, at home, sub-contracting, insecure self-employment, under the table, etc. (Olagne and Zafari, 2000) According to the OECD, there are significantly more women in these kinds of jobs. Even if a minority of women have access to the better paid sectors, the vast majority of women continue to be home workers, garment workers, street sellers, seasonal agricultural workers, etc. In the North, rich countries are increasingly reproducing the "model" of the South, completely deregulated!

-even though violence against women existed before globalization and is rooted in the continuing domination of men over women (Rojtman, WM 2000), insecure economic conditions accentuate women's vulnerability to all forms of violence. Notably, we are seeing globalization of the traffic in women and prostitution due to increased poverty, a rise in sex tourism and expansion of the global sex industry, not to mention systematic violence in times of war (rapes, sexual assaults, etc.). According to the UN special rapporteur on violence against women, "the exploitation of women's bodies is an international industry. . .tricked, forced, seduced or sold, women find themselves in situations analogous to slavery, whether they are prostitutes, domestic workers, sweatshop labourers or simply wives." (Coomaraswamy, 1997). This is a particularly horrible facet of globalization that your policies do not take into account. And the traffic flows in the same direction as debt repayment: from South to North, and from East to West.

4. IS GENDER REALLY BEING TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT?

You emphasize that discrimination against women in all sectors of life constitutes a major obstacle to development. Yes, indeed that is so! You claim to be taking gender into account in your policies. And it is true: the World Bank has multiplied programs for women in health, education, professional training (WB, 2000); it has set up consultative mechanism (External Gender Consultative Group) to promote gender equity in its operations.

However, systematic examination of WB programs in 10 Latin American countries (Women's Eyes on the World Bank, 2000) is disturbing, specifically with respect to three indicators: correspondence between stated objectives and practice, equity, and participation of civil society, especially of women:

-there is a deep gap between the World Bank's stated objectives and its practice in the field, a gap resulting from the lack of an adequate conceptual framework that incorporates the factor of gender, and a lack of human and financial resources. But failure to meet the commitments made in Beijing is also a result of a lax attitude on the part of the WB towards governments who do not wish to conform with gender

recommendations. The WB is more directive when it comes to imposing economic conditions or privatization!

-The WB attempts to promote socioeconomic equity in health and education services, but gender is not incorporated. Furthermore, the objectives of some projects dictate that women be confined to their traditional role as mothers. Such policies reinforce traditional roles and maintain inequality between women and men. Education projects focus on making school accessible to girls with no concern for results: it is not therefore surprising to find women in the worst jobs, and to observe that they earn less than men for the same kind of work, and are concentrated in the informal sector. All these factors are part and parcel of the feminization of poverty.

-Finally, despite the WB's efforts to set up participatory processes, the level and quality of participation remain questionable and a far cry from "empowering" women to influence the WB's policies so that they really reflect their needs and interests.

These kinds of results, you will agree, are enough to generate a healthy skepticism with regard to claims that women's interests are being taken into account. A gender perspective without real means to get women out of poverty is an illusion. Indeed, the UNDP reminds us that "the gender-blindness of most poverty programs reveals the weak links, theoretical and practical, between gender and poverty—due to problems on both sides. Poverty programs have not ordinarily incorporated gender as an important dimension. And gender programs have not done well in focusing on poverty." (UNDP, 2000)

More importantly, the gender perspective is only taken into consideration for specific projects and not at all when it comes to macro-economic policies such as structural adjustment programs. The macro-economy has no sex, according to your institutions! Yet the women's movement has strongly criticized this simplistic and traditional view of the economy. Numerous feminists have for a long time demanded that women's unpaid work be taken into account as one of the principal components in the production of wealth and well-being. They have demanded recognition of the economic links between the paid and unpaid sectors. They have called into question the vertical and horizontal segregation of women and men in the labour market and they have questioned the distribution and relations of power in the dominant economic system (Bakker & Elson, 1998; Ghosh, 1999; Madörin, 2000).

Finally, we realize that the gender perspective can easily be incorporated into the existing dominant economic system: some women will make progress toward equality with men, while neoliberal capitalist policies continue to be implemented. The World March of Women refuses this scenario; we are convinced of the need to simultaneously attack capitalism and sexism.

5. THE ILLEGITIMATE DEBT

5.1 Who owes what to whom?

This is our question to you. For us, the answer is fairly simple. We must shift perspective and recognize that the North, in fact, owes the South the billions of dollars stolen during the 19th and 20th centuries.

We refer to the systematic and "legal" theft during colonial times that brought entire peoples to their knees, destroyed their capacity for self-development, prevented the emergence of other models for growth and literally assassinated thousands of people (torture, wars, repression, slave trade, etc.). Colonizers of the era pillaged the natural resources of developing countries. Today transnational companies "occupy" the best land to extract its raw materials and for intensive agricultural production destined for exportation, just as they control the global market for raw materials. It may be another era, but the same mores prevail.

We use the term organized theft to describe the deteriorating conditions in which trade takes place and the structural adjustment policies that result in overproduction of export goods in countries of the South that leads to falling prices and decreased capacity to pay the so-called debt.

This theft has been supported by a loans policy that enslaves Third World people—and recently people of Eastern Europe—and assures the transfer of their wealth to countries that are already rich, thus maintaining a vicious circle: oppressed poor countries helping countries of the North to fill their coffers until the North monopolizes the capital and then "loans" their own money back to them! The world is upside down, and it is the South who in reality is financing the North! You know this perfectly well: in 1998, the 41 heavily indebted poor countries transferred 1680 million more dollars than they received to creditors in the North (WB, 2000). Not to mention all the other ways wealth is transferred from the South to the North: flight of capital, transfer of profits, commissions/bribes to obtain contracts, money placed in tax havens or hidden in Swiss banks protected by banking secrecy.

Indebtedness is at once a process, a system and an extremely efficient mechanism of oppression, control and subordination of the peoples and governments of the countries of the Third World and the East to the interests of the richest countries of the planet, in essence, the G7 (WB, 2000), to whom your institutions act as accomplices. This system is an attack on States' sovereignty. It is the modern version of colonialism and imperialism.

The "legality" and "legitimacy" of this system are being questioned, however, by an ever-growing number of citizens, from the South and from the North; civil society teems with initiatives in this respect, such as the Jubilee 2000 campaigns. Argentinean courts have just handed down an important judgment that declares the economic loans policies contracted during the military dictatorship of 1976-1982 to be contrary to the nation's interests (Correo, 2000). That corruption exists in the South (as it does in the North, who is ill-placed as moral leader), no one doubts. But when you make loans to criminals, you become their accomplices.

5.2 Nothing has been resolved

We were told that the G7 resolved the problem of the Third World debt a year ago, in June 1999 in Cologne. The message was repeated in Okinawa in July of this year and again in

Prague! It is false. All the analysts observing these decisions arrive at the same conclusions, among them (Jubilee 2000, CADTM, 2000; 50 Years is Enough, ATTAC):

-the amounts that were announced never materialized;

-creditors make debt relief conditional on the policies of the "Strategic Frameworks for Fighting Poverty" (another name for structural adjustment programs) that in turn, impose new obligations;

-the "improvements" are microscopic! A 2% increase in spending on health and education after 20 years of cutbacks or never investing at all, amounts to almost nothing. At this pace, we will have to wait until 2010 before we reach 1985 spending levels!

- Past mistakes of the IMF and the WB (whose charters prohibit debt forgiveness) are being bailed out thanks to the public treasury of industrialized countries. Your institutions are being reimbursed in this way and furthermore, you are contributing to increased speculation, because the money is to be placed in a trust fund on the financial markets.

-this initiative only concerns the amount of the bilateral debt as it existed before the first pay schedule adjustment, while most of the debt accumulated after that!

-it is an arbitrary initiative that excludes very poor indebted countries. And 80% of the planet's poorest people live in countries that do not figure among the "heavily indebted poor countries."

-even more serious, is the fact that industrialized countries dip into official development assistance in order to reimburse private sector creditors, thereby reducing an already meager allotment for this economic assistance;

-last, the mechanism links debt forgiveness to the purchase of materials from the North.

Nothing has been resolved, far from it. The initiators of the Jubilee 2000 campaign have weighed in: the settlement is not going fast enough (only five countries so far), it is only partial (debts reduced by only 40%), it is not broad enough (key countries still excluded), it is neither just nor transparent (a new process must be considered). The Jubilee 2000 Coalition warns world leaders about a 'looming scandal' if immediate measures are not taken." (Jubilee, 2000)

5.3 An essential condition for combating poverty

Between the beginning of the debt crisis in 1980 and today, debtor countries have repaid what they owed four times over, and the amount of their debt has also multiplied by four! (Toussaint, 1998). In 1996, sub-Saharan Africa (600 million people, 10% of the world's population, 1% of world investments) paid \$14.5 billion US to servicing the debt, or \$18,000 US per minute. This almost equals the amount they received in official development assistance during the same year (\$14 billion US). At this rate and level of indebtedness, the best WB programs will never succeed in closing the gap.

Refusal to cancel the debt or offering minuscule relief maintains part of humankind under the yoke of the "new colonizers"—international creditors, the IMF, the WB, the Paris Club, the London Club, etc.

Debt cancellation will not magically bring about the end of poverty, but it is a required condition.

6. IMPACT ON WOMEN OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMS

Structural adjustment programs always follow the same course: short-term economic stabilization (devaluation, control of the national money supply, wage de-indexation, fiscal austerity, price freeing, etc.) and structural reform (liberalization of trade, privatization of state enterprises and land, fiscal reform, liberalization of capital movements and the banking system, recycling "dirty" money into servicing the debt, etc). (Chossudovsky, 1997) Personal accounts, experience and writing are full of examples and analysis about the impact on women of the SAPs.(UNIFEM, Alternatives Sud, etc.) Clearly, the consequences for women of this policy are substantially the same, regardless of the country, culture, level of development, etc.

As far back as the 1980s, your institutions were already aware of the impact on women of the SAPs. A Commonwealth Expert Group on Women and Structural Adjustment reported that women were at the center of the economic crisis in the 1980s, assuming the lion's share of the burden of adjustment. The report went on to say that while on the surface, structural adjustment programs were gender-neutral, in reality they were more demanding of women than men, as much in the formal sector as in the unstructured sector of the economy. They cut back on essential services to protect the family and, in many cases, erased the economic gains won by women during the three preceding decades (UN, 1995).

Twenty years later, the same policy is producing the same results and other women suffer the same consequences. We will begin with one example (El-Nakkash, 2000) and follow it with other, similar examples (Kanji and Jazdowska, 1999).

6.1 Feminization of poverty and disease; rising job insecurity: the example of Egypt

Here is how Egyptian women describe the consequences of an agreement signed between the Egyptian government and the IMF and WB in 1991, whereby the Egyptian government committed to setting up structural adjustment programs:

Feminization of poverty

- increase in under-age children working for irregular wages in conditions threatening or dangerous to their health and safety;
- increase in the number of children living in the streets of the large cities;
- rise in the number of children—massively girls—withdrawn from school;

-more young girls, even little girls, working in private homes or workshops with no legal protection;

-more women working in the informal sector where they have no legal protection in terms of work hours, insurance, health care, or any other labour rights. The massive arrival of women in the informal sector also results in job losses for women, men and children working at unskilled low-paying jobs, throwing them into the ranks of the unemployed. We've known for a long time that this situation, combined with sexism, results in the departure of men from the family, leaving women alone with all the responsibility.

Feminization of disease

The Egyptian government has gone from investing 5.1% of its total budget in health during 1966-67, to 1.4% in 1994-95, with severe consequences on women:

-in one study, 57% of women describe suffering from depression compared to 24% of men, a problem of huge proportions!

-higher mortality rates in women as they grow older, explained by reduced access to health and disease prevention services. In one village, for example, only 5% of women **did not** suffer from sexually transmitted diseases;

-because health services have been privatized, people must have an income to gain access to them. Because women's position in the labour market is substantially weaker than that of men, they are often unable to pay for medical help;

Job insecurity

The government promotes policy that is advantageous to business at the expense of workers, such as deregulation and the reduction of corporate charges. At the same time, they have cut back on the civil service. Women are the first to pay the price:

-mounting unemployment. According to the Egyptian Federal Bureau of Statistics, "there are fewer and fewer jobs for men, and even fewer for women. As usual, in periods of increased unemployment, the simplest answer seems to be to send women back to the home. In 1992, the unemployment rate had already reached 17%. Four out of seven unemployed people were women." (Rady, 1997)

-lack of access to maternity leave and childcare facilities is also a barrier to women receiving higher wages;

-transition from employment in the public sector where rights are usually protected, health insurance is provided, working conditions are safer, etc., to the informal sector, where women still have neither voice nor rights;

-no right to unionize, therefore a weakened capacity for negotiation;

-persistence of prejudice resulting in women being forbidden to work at night—while in sectors such as health, availability for night shifts is a job requirement; focus on youth and physical appearance. One study revealed that in a leading daily newspaper, 28.5% of the job offers were for "seductive secretaries," 10% were for saleswomen, and 0.5% were for lawyers!

6.2 Curtailed access to land and local cultivation: the example of Uganda and India

Here too, we could provide numerous examples:

-in Uganda, as everywhere else, the World Bank promotes agricultural production for export. As Wichterich reports, the best land is monopolized to this end, to the detriment of the grain and vegetable crops that ensure self-subsistence. Food production is thus being sacrificed to the demands of the market. Women are forced to farm in the bush or on hilly terrain, and to over-cultivate, thus laying the ground for future erosion. Ecological devastation and continually diminishing food production are the consequences of your policies in Uganda. (Wichterich, 2000)

-in India, pressure is enormous (by, among others, the World Bank, who is financing this new production) to develop in the area of aquaculture—the so-called "blue revolution"—in particular shrimp farming. But the presence of salt water and chemical products has lowered rice yields on nearby fields by 30%. Coconut and mango harvests have fallen by half, vegetable yields are even worse, and chickens and ducks are dying off (Shiva, 1996, Wichterich, 2000).

6.3 Other examples: Peru, Zimbabwe, Zambia

In Peru, "Fuji shock" generated exactly the same consequences, beginning in 1990, a situation particularly rude to women:

-prices of food and gas tripled in one night;

-in 1991, 83% of the population was not consuming enough protein, and the rate of nutritional deficiency in children was over 38%;

-one child in four in the country, and one child in six in Lima died before the age of five;

-the proportion of poor people rose from 40% to 60%;

- access to health care was reduced because of the obligation to pay for services that were formerly free of charge. The end of vaccination programs: during the 1992 cholera epidemic, 2000 people paid with their lives for this shock therapy, and 100,000 people suffered severe illness. Tuberculosis also reached endemic proportions, while malaria and dengue fever spread at an alarming rate.

-transition to the unregulated economic sector: in addition to the 10% jobless, 77% of the active population in 1993 worked in the deregulated sector. Women's earnings were, for the most part, below the poverty line. The ILO estimates that 84% of the "new jobs" created between 1990 and 1995 in Latin America and the Caribbean were non-regulated. We can assume their earnings were not sufficient to live on. (Wichterich, 2000)

Zimbabwe: This country has seen important improvements since the implementation of public education and health systems. But after a system of "fees per service" was set up, in the context of structural adjustment, 40% fewer X-rays were performed between 1991 and 1993, the hospital bed vacancy rate ranged from 20% to 30%, the maternal mortality rate skyrocketed, tuberculosis monitoring was abruptly ended, the average life expectancy dropped, 26% of children stopped attending school, and doctors and teachers emigrated on a massive scale to neighbouring countries in search of higher salaries. (Wichterich, 2000)

In **Zambia**, where 20% of the population is HIV-positive, the government allocates \$17 US per person to health services while \$30 US goes to servicing the debt, in conformance with your institutions' structural adjustment policies (50 Years is Enough).

The negative impact of structural adjustment programs has not only been observed by women of the World March; the UN's own agencies have made similar findings. Since 1983, for example, UNICEF has reported that women and children in particular have paid a gigantic social price for structural adjustment programs. The World Health Organization (WHO) has also observed dramatically diminished investment in women's health, during a period of mounting prosperity. The international rise in maternal mortality is one of the indicators of this phenomenon. Many of these deaths can easily be prevented. Women are becoming ill as a result of poverty, and the impossibility of escaping it. According to the director of the WHO, the maternal mortality rate in Russia, China, India and Cuba is higher today than it was in 1990. In 51 other States, there has been no improvement. According to the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights, health is no longer considered to be a fundamental human right; it has become a product that must be purchased on the market place (Wichterich, 2000).

To this list, we must add increasing violence against women in a context of extreme financial pressure on families, and the harm to the mental health of women who are forced to assume multiple roles in order to assure the survival of their loved ones (McGowan, 2000).

It has been clear for a long time that structural adjustment programs destroy societies as effectively as bombing campaigns. "Indeed, when the IMF obliges a country to dismantle its social and economic institutions and infrastructure, the resulting destruction very closely resembles that caused by the NATO bombings." (Chossudovsky, 2000)

Is it not time to put a definitive end to these policies?

7 WHAT WE WANT

At the very least, your policies instill doubt and undermine the credibility of your institutions. But we are witnessing mounting and fierce opposition in increasingly numerous

sectors, some pushing for immediate major reform, others wanting to get rid of these old institutions; all of them are calling for a new Bretton Woods.

The World March of Women joins the ranks of these critics and affirms that for your institutions there are 2000 good reasons to change course! Words are not enough, we demand concrete and immediate actions!

5.1. A change of course

Let us be clear, however. We are not against globalization; on the contrary: we want globalization based on equitable wealth distribution, equality between women and men, solidarity among countries and respect for the environment.

Millions of women actively participating in the World March are calling for an end to structural **adjustment** and demanding structural **transformation** instead. There is no ready-made plan or kit, however.

A new social program (at the local, regional, national and international levels) can be developed based on women's and citizens' movements, the gains of the international community—especially the charters, conventions, and protocols calling for the respect of human rights—the democratization of all existing institutions, and the innovative and alternative solutions that have already been adopted in the context of the anti-poverty struggle and the movement to end violence against women. (World March of Women, 2000) This is the contribution of the World March of Women to the construction of a new global architecture.

Poverty and violence against women and children are not "natural" phenomena: they have been politically, economically, culturally and socially constructed. It is therefore up to us to eliminate them by working simultaneously on the political, economic, cultural and social fronts.

Your institutions can play an important role.

However, your action must cease to be rooted exclusively in neo-liberal capitalism.

You must also cease to be compliant in the face of patriarchal institutions and attitudes.

Finally, your institutions must make equitable redistribution of the wealth an integral part of your objectives. Because, as you doubtless realize, the world's greatest problem is not poverty—humanity has never been so rich—it is the distribution and collective appropriation of the wealth. Since everyone contributes to producing wealth, it should belong to all and not only to a small minority. That developed countries still refuse to give 0,7% of their GNP in official development assistance is unacceptable ! That there is so much resistance in the international community to the Tobin Tax is inconceivable ! That there are still tax havens and banking secrecy is scandalous !

A fundamental question must also be posed of international financial institutions: is reform required, or should you be replaced by new institutions? What of your connections with the

UN, etc. The World March has not taken a position on all the proposals that are being debated at the moment; for example, concerning a centralized world bank. But we do intend to contribute to the debate by publicizing the proposal for a council for economic and financial security under the authority of the UN that is charged with redefining the rules of a new global financial system that is fair, participatory and rooted in solidarity.

It is urgently necessary therefore, to examine paths other than the ones already taken, that are maintaining inequality and violence against women. You said it yourself in Prague *Something's wrong when 20% of the richest individuals own 80% of the world's wealth* (Wolfensohn, Le Devoir, 29 of September 2000)

We are committing to ongoing mobilization to pressure your institutions into a real change of course.

7.2 Immediate demands

Allied with numerous citizen movements around the world, the World March of Women makes the following demands of your institutions:

Transparency and accountability

Transparency and accountability of your institutions with regard to civil society and the authentic participation of women in policy making, implementation and evaluation, and in negotiations between States, the WB and the IMF;¹

Integration of the gender perspective in policies and programs

Integration and application of the gender perspective (gender-based analysis) as much in the macroeconomic policies of the IMF and WB as in their programs and individual projects.

Increased financial resources for women

Substantially increased financial resources for women in the traditionally "female" sectors (health, education, nutrition) and also in the non-traditional sectors (access to land, credit, training, etc.)² This means providing the financial means to enable women to get out of poverty; without it, the "gender perspective" is only a hollow phrase.

Cancellation of the debt of all Third World countries, taking into account the principles of responsibility, transparency of information and accountability.

¹ Many proposals are being made to increase the transparency and accountability of the international financial institutions. For example: that negotiations concerning any policy (loans, aid, etc.) between a country and the IMF or WB be made public and submitted to a democratic decision by national parliaments.

² Among the suggestions: allocate financial resources for development by and with women of new economic models and policies rooted in women's point of view and experiences.

In the short term, the immediate cancellation of the debt of the 53 poorest countries on the planet, in support of the objectives of the Jubilee 2000 campaign;

In the longer term, the cancellation of the debt of all Third World countries and the setting up of a mechanism to monitor the debt write-off, ensuring that this money is employed to eliminate poverty and to further the well-being of people most affected by SAPs, the majority of whom are women and children.³ Needless to say, one of the criteria for development of this mechanism is the vigilant participation of civil society.

We demand that your institutions take this concrete action without delay. It is the only meaningful signal that will restore hope in impoverished peoples, particularly women. It would be tangible evidence that your institutions have truly decided to move from words to action.

An end to structural adjustment programs and their clones

We have already said enough about the disastrous effects of these programs. The main thing is to eliminate them, opening the way for endogenous development that is controlled by the population, rather than by the dictates of neo-liberal orthodoxy.

CONCLUSION

This letter is a declaration of opposition and pacific resistance to your policies. We will be everywhere denouncing, demanding, evaluating, and proposing. We are marching:

-so that in the next millennium, women's fundamental rights, inseparable from our human rights and undeniably universal in nature, are implemented once and for all. We are determined in our belief that all human rights are interdependent and that the values of equality, justice, peace, and solidarity will prevail.

-to demonstrate that women's participation in political, economic, cultural and social life is the starting point of liberation for ourselves and for our communities who are too often excluded from decision-making on issues that directly concern us;

-to create a world based on sharing our common spiritual and material wealth so that every woman and man has the means to make a living and make living worthwhile.

³ Among suggestions for using this money: allocate 20% of resources to programs that deal with the question of gender.

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