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Letter from Laetitia Van Den Assum to Mildred Persinger, July 29, 1979

Laetitia Van Ven Assum

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MINISTERIE VAN BUITENLANDSE ZAKEN

PLEIN 23 — 's-GRAVENHAGE

*She was one of our
Tribune
benefactor*

The Hague, 29 July 1979.

Dear Mildred,

Thank you for the two letters I received lately. I am sorry I didn't have an opportunity to reply sooner than this but things have been extremely hectic lately. Right now it is a quiet Sunday evening and I have a good opportunity to collect my thoughts. The past eight weeks or so I have almost exclusively spent my time on the Indo Chinese refugee problem which consumed quite an extraordinary amount of energy. Perhaps I told you that apart from women's questions within the UN system I also deal with UNHCR and UNICEF. Usually those two do not take up much of my time, though.

I spent one month in Mexico in May/June attending the UNICEF Board meeting which I enjoyed very much. Also had an opportunity to visit various UNICEF projects in the state of Quintana Roo, some of them dealt with women. It was a good experience. Afterwards I used the opportunity to travel around Mexico on my own for about a week. Never having been there I tried to get a good cross section of what the country has to offer. Unfortunately time was short. Upon my return I plunged into the refugee problems and only now, a week after the Geneva conference (new ribbon!), I feel I am regaining control of all the piles of work on my desk.

I did have time to attend the ECE -seminar on 'the role of women in the economic evolution of the ECE-region' in Paris (July 9-12). I wasn't at all impressed with it. The first of the regional preparatory meetings for the Copenhagen Conference hopefully did not set standards for what is to follow during the next year. It was a disaster! It seemed as if many delegations had come there with the intention of preventing anything constructive from taking place. The Scandinavian delegations went so far as to admit that. They were afraid that the seminar might lead to a European plan of action. I had not set my hopes too high but nevertheless had hoped that we would have an opportunity for an East-West dialogue on problems which both regions share. Willingness was lacking completely, though. When one of the Dutch delegates stated that child care to some extent should be seen as a responsibility of society at large, she received support from Eastern European countries only. Western Europe stayed very quiet. Even Sweden, which has a heavily government subsidized day care system, did not speak out in favour of it. We seem to be back to square one..... However, the meeting did present a good opportunity to meet people and to exchange information. I had a long talk with Katherine Strong about the female circumcision group in

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Geneva which in its first year of existence received some financial assistance from the Dutch government. Also met Hanna Boye of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs who is in charge of organizing the Worldconference. She did seem interested in an NGO conference, but stressed that the initiative should come from NGO's themselves, who should also take care of all the organizing work, financial and administrative matters. I do not think that much financial help can be expected from the Danish government. She said that she had talked with the NGO committee which had recently visited Copenhagen and that she was now waiting to hear further details of the NGO's plans. She will be attending the second session of the Preparatory Committee in New York in August/September. I think it might be useful for various NGO's to have a talk with her.

I will be in New York for the PrepCom as well (27 Aug - 7 Sept.). It seems I am destined to become Vice-President of the meeting. Hope all will go well and that we will be able to undo some of the decisions that were made at the first session when the plans were being made for Teheran. I would very much like an opportunity to visit the new centre and to hear about the plans for the future. I was very happy to hear that everything is going so well, and so are the co-ordinators. I will not have much time but at least we can have a preliminary discussion about a possible Dutch contribution for next year. I will return to NY again on September 29 and will be there for appr. 2 months during the General Assembly. That should give us plenty of time to discuss the future. During the G.A. I will be dealing with all social development matters in the Third Committee, including the Draft Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. I hope we will be able to conclude our work on that, although I foresee quite a few problems. The trend towards an increasingly strict interpretation of Islamic laws will certainly not help the Convention.

I look forward to seeing you all in August! I will try to get in touch as soon as possible. Will be staying at the Shelburne - Murray Hill Hotel (Lex. and 40 str., I think).

Regards,

Caetitia

Caetitia van der Meer

Sorry, but late at night my typing is not at its best!!