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Letter from Willie Campbell to Cyrus Vance, March 1, 1979

Willie Campbell

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March 1, 1979

The Hon. Cyrus S. Vance
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20020

Denmark

Dear Mr. Secretary,

The Board of Directors of the Overseas Education Fund of the League of Women Voters, a nationally based group, at its regular meeting on March 1 in Washington, D.C. instructed me to request specific information from you on the status of preparations for the 1980 World Conference of the UN Decade for Women scheduled to convene for two weeks in Denmark in July. We are particularly concerned about lack of support and resources being devoted to this project which presents an opportunity for a unique United States contribution.

As you know, this Conference will assess progress made in implementing the goals of the World Plan of Action adopted by 133 governments at the 1975 World Conference of International Women's Year: Equality, Development and Peace. It will recommend priorities for the remainder of the 1976- 85 Decade and will also consider the effects of apartheid on the status of women. Major themes are Employment, Health and Education.

The OEF Board has been informed that a number of other governments are already well advanced in preparation of their positions for the 1980 Conference. The U.S. has the opportunity to do much more. It can share with the Conference the results of a recent remarkable demonstration of the democratic process: the formulation and adoption of a U.S. Plan of Action by the most representative assembly of American women (and some men) ever brought together. Delegates to the federally funded 1977 National Women's Conference, a follow-up of the World Conference of IWY, were chosen in open elections by 56 state and territorial women's meetings. They included a proportionate number of women representing the least developed sectors of the United States. These Americans are only too familiar with the problems to be considered at Copenhagen: joblessness, malnutrition and disease, illiteracy and the effects of racial discrimination. Approximately one fifth of the delegates, on the other hand, classified themselves as "traditional" women who preferred no change in their role and status. Fully exercising their right to press their position, they contributed a significant minority view to the debate at Houston, as 100 invited international leaders watched with wonder.

We believe that millions in the U.S. and others beyond its borders will expect that the resolutions adopted by the National Women's Conference, wherever relevant to the themes of the World Conference, will serve as a basis for the U.S. position at Copenhagen. These persons include the 20,000 delegates and observers at Houston, foreign guests, the 200,000 participants in state and territorial meetings and the untold numbers who followed these events through the news media.

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The task of integrating this material with that of appropriate governmental sources and the extensive programs of private voluntary organizations, and relating it to the World Plan of Action, the UN Programme for the Decade for Women, the Strategy for the Third Development Decade and other General Assembly resolutions is challenging. We have received inquiries as to how U.S. preparations are coming along in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs and whether adequate staff support has been assembled for those who are responsible for representing the U.S. at what may be the most visible of all UN World Conferences.

The U.S. abstention on the vote authorizing the budget for the Mid-Decade World Conference does not encourage us. In fact, U.S. women's groups and others who are aware of this omission are deeply distressed that the U.S. general position on expenditures had to be applied with no regard for the principle of affirmative action.

We hope you will be able to respond to this inquiry with the encouraging news that preparations for the 1980 World Conference are receiving attention and resources commensurate with preparations for other UN conferences. Your assistance in providing this information will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Willie Campbell
President