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Hotline International Report on International Women's Year/ Conference

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HOTLINE INTERNATIONAL REPORT
ON
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR/CONFERENCE

From June 19 to July 2, 1975, about 1200 governmental delegates from 130 countries met at the invitation of the Mexican Government, under the auspices of the United Nations/International Women's Year to discuss the role of women in society and to develop a World Plan of Action.

At the same time, five miles across Mexico City, about 5,800 international representatives of non-governmental organizations met in a Tribune to discuss the same subjects but without agenda and without protocol but with people power. They were not bound by political considerations as much as by moral and ethical considerations.

Simultaneously, many, many miles away in the United States and Canada groups representing local, national and international non-governmental organizations met to discuss the agenda items of the inter-governmental body and the common concerns that were being discussed at the non-governmental Tribune.

At these meetings, the attendance size varied. At the three meetings held in New York at the United Nations, the group size averaged about 50 individuals representing about 45 organizations. In Philadelphia, with two meetings, they averaged about 300 individuals. A number of differences were apparent from city to city, the cities included Washington, Baltimore, Buffalo, Philadelphia, New York, Cleveland, Chicago, San Francisco, Hanover, Worcester and Vancouver. We were in touch with Honolulu, Miami, Denver, Memphis, Boston, Syracuse and Ames, Iowa, as well as Tehran, Toronto, Manila, Cairo and London...but we were not able to complete arrangements. With adequate funds and time, it will be possible to create an international communications network.

Not only did the numbers and types of individuals represented differ, but so also did the format for the meetings. Some were structured as in Philadelphia; some emphasized the international implications; while others concentrated on national issues.

But what the groups had in common was interest in the subject and unity through the use of a computer network. On their computer terminals, they received information from Mexico City on what was happening there and were able to participate by responding through their terminals. The responses were often related to resolutions already under discussion as well as new ideas and emphasis. A report of the meeting held at the UN by the Ad Hoc Committee of the UN Secretariat Women was forwarded immediately to Mexico City and transmitted by the Mexico Task Force. Questions posed by any of the focal points were answered by any of the geographical focal points knowing the answers. In the month, over 120 messages were entered into the IBM/370 computer through the National CSS Time Sharing System.

The Mexico Task Force was composed of two HOTLINE coordinators and a computer operator. But the information gathered and circulated by a group of NGOs was done by volunteers who had agreed to participate before their departure.

Telephone conference calls were held weekly and encouraged direct questions and answers in addition to listening to Mexico reports. The final call involved New York City, Washington, Cleveland, Chicago and Philadelphia on line. For those focal points not on the conference line, a resume of information was entered into the computer.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE COMPUTER CONFERENCE

1. FREEDOM FROM TIME CONSTRAINTS: Ability to put things in and take them out at times that are most convenient.
2. SELECTIVITY: One may select the items one wants to read and the items to which one wishes to respond.
3. INDEX: The specially prepared Index permits the wide variety of subjects listed to be easily identified and selected.
4. COMPUTER TERMINAL RESPONSE: A typed input results in a more carefully considered response. There is less likelihood of an emotional one.
5. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY: Each individual has an equal possibility to enter input.
6. NEW FORM OF COMMUNICATION AT CONFERENCES: Absence of voice and body and facial movements and expressions creates a different quality to the communications.
7. NUMBERS: Participation is possible for an unlimited number of people in an unlimited number of places as groups and as individuals.

This type of conference-going is unique. All the participants could take part and still remain at home, and feel part of the action. They could select the subjects in which they have a special interest. Furthermore, they could generate in their community some of the excitement that was being generated at the site of the conference; they could serve as information purveyors, as special communication links between the conference and the community; they could via their computer terminals have an input to the conference.

HOTLINE INTERNATIONAL is a non-profit experiment to use technology to broaden the impact of conferences, to permit more people to play a role in the decision-making process and, of course, to heighten understanding of what goes on at international conferences.

July 18, 1975
54 Riverside Drive (P.H.E.)
New York, New York 10024

Glen Leet
Millie Robbins Leet
Co-Directors
HOTLINE INTERNATIONAL