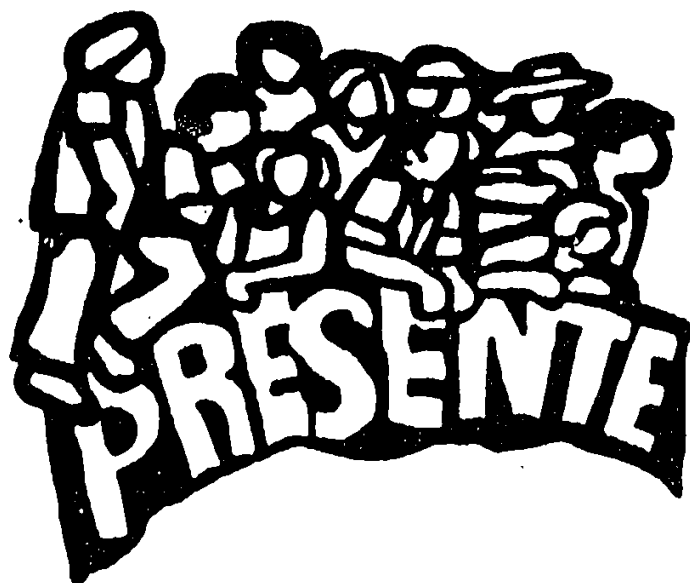


No 17  
October 1994

# **WRI WOMEN**



**the  
newsletter  
of the  
women's  
working  
group of  
War Resisters  
International**



**Women in Brazil's Environmental  
Movement**

**Violence Against Women in Haiti**

**New Address: War Resisters International  
5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX, UK**

Newsletter of the Women's Working Group  
of the War Resisters International

Editor: Shelley Anderson  
Lay-out: Françoise Pottier

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Thanks to all the contributors. Opinions expressed in  
this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the view of WRI.

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The Email address remains the same:  
warresisters@gn.apc.org.**

## FOCUS ON LATIN AMERICA (CONTINUED...)



This issue of the *WRI Women's Working Group Newsletter* continues our focus on Latin America, in preparation for the War Resisters' International (WRI) Triennial. We are very happy that many experienced activists have agreed to be resource women for this year's Triennial, which will be held December 10-17, in Sao Leopoldo, Brazil. Joining us around the theme of "Determination and Resistance: How Women Work Against Violence" will be Saswati Roy (India), leader in a Calcutta-based women's development organization; Chaya Shalom (Israel), co-founder of the Women and Peace Coalition and former coordinator of Bat-Adam, a coalition of organisations against violence against women; Elaine Hewitt (India/Barbados) of the Caribbean-based Women and Development Unit; Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge (South Africa), former chair of the Natal Organisation of Women and activist with Women in the Struggle for Peace; Stasa Zajovic (Serbia) of Women in Black and the Anti-War Center in Belgrade; Vesna Terselic (Croatia) of the Anti-War Campaign in Croatia; and Carmen Magallon, an anti-militarism activist in the State of Spain. Many of these women were at the 1992 4th WRI Women's Conference in Bangkok; we look forward to learning from their experiences again. We want to hear your experiences, too: come and join us in Sao Leopoldo!

Shelley Anderson

# **FEMINISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN BRAZIL**

by Jacqueline Pitanguy and Selene Herculano

Brazil has paid a high price for the development policies that transformed it, within four decades, from one of Latin America's poorest coffee-growing countries into one of the world's ten largest economies. Brazil today is plagued by massive debt, galloping inflation, stagnant economic growth and widening disparity between the rich and the poor. For example, the richest 20 percent of the population earn over 65 percent of the national income while the poorest 20 percent earn less than 3 percent. Furthermore, 2 percent of the country's farmers own over half the arable land and almost half the population lives below the poverty line.

The situation is worst in the impoverished and overpopulated Northeast (Nordesti), where deforestation, soil erosion, air pollution and overuse of fertilizers have deteriorated the environmental conditions and the quality of life of its inhabitants. The rapid growth of Brazilian cities and industries, especially in the Northeast, has spawned huge, overcrowded slums: shanty towns (favelas) plagued by inadequate water and sanitation, appalling urban pollution, disease, and the risk of landslides and other calamities triggered by environmental degradation.

Infant mortality is twice as high in Brazil as in China, despite a Gross National Product (GNP) seven times as high. Brazil's poor suffer most from its environmental woes, especially its poor women.

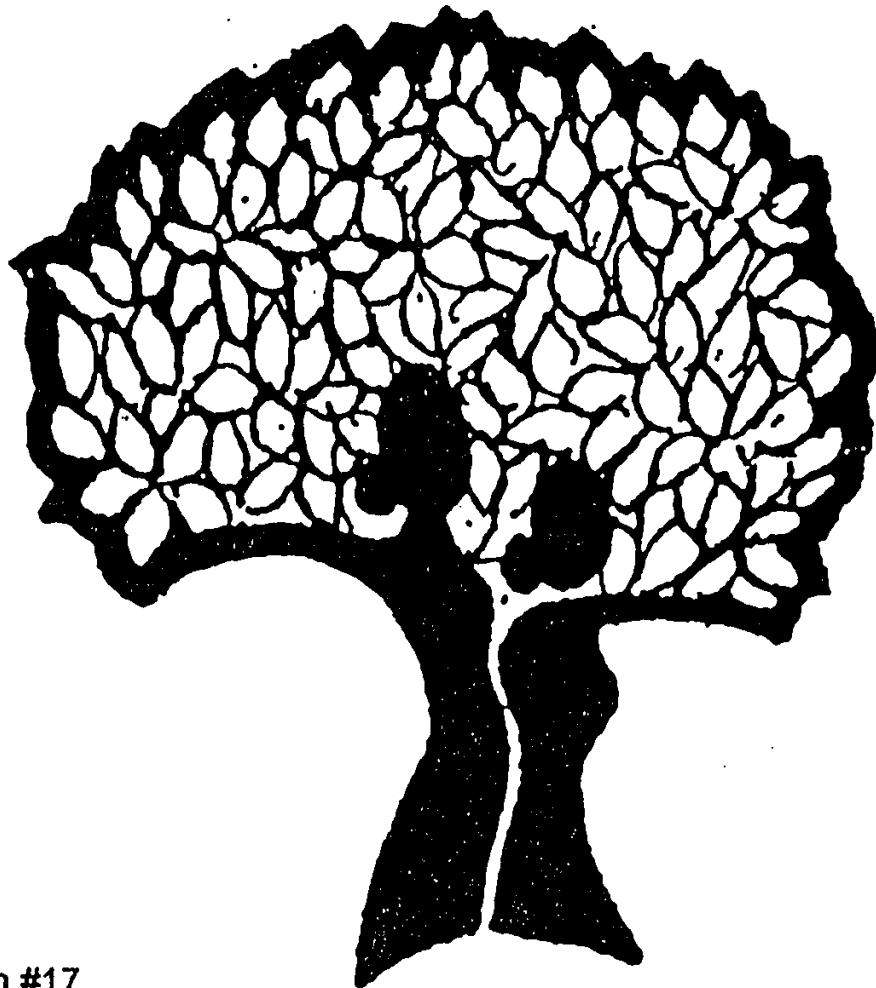
Women's participation in the labor force has grown rapidly, from 15 percent in 1950 to 39 percent by the beginning of 1990, according to the Brazilian Institute for Statistics and Geography. But women still earn 52 percent of what men do, are still barred from many jobs, still perform uncounted hours of domestic work, and take on additional income-earning tasks when they must. Women make up a large portion of Brazil's many "informal workers" who do not have access to professional cards or social security benefits.

Environmental and feminist issues have, for the most part, been dealt with by government and civil society as separate issues. Women in Brazil, however, have been concerned about environmental degradation and its effect on the quality of life for decades. This concern was not translated into political action of any importance until both the environmentalists and the feminists organized and gained political leverage.

Some significant leaders include Paula Frassinetti Lins Duarte. Born to a poor black family, she is now the head of a very important environmental association in the Northeast. First a school teacher, she became a biologist, returning to her home in Pernambuco. In 1978 she made contacts with other biologists who were very involved with environmental questions and founded APAN (Paraíba's Association of the Friends of Nature) along with another biologist. Paula teaches poor children that they have a right to quality of life; she also educates peasants on the risks of agrottoxics and their right to work in a health environment. APAN's advocacy work has succeeded in stopping a tourist development project which would have destroyed 370 hectares of legally protected sites. APAN has also achieved an article in the state Constitution which forbids high buildings at the seashore.

## **ENVIRONMENTALISM IN BRAZILIAN CIVIL SOCIETY**

Despite some governmental codes in the early 1930s, for many decades environmental concerns in Brazil were mostly the expression of concerned citizens, first of conservationists and later of those who opposed the predatory development practices of the military regime that took power in 1964.



In the late 1960s, the defense of the rain forests against external exploitation became part of the agenda of the opposition to the military regime. In 1966 a campaign was launched by diverse groups of citizens who opposed the "internationalization" of Brazilian territory. Shortly after the National Campaign for the Defense and Development of Amazonia (CNDDA) was founded, other environmental groups were founded, among them the first women's environmental organizations, the Democratic Association of Gaucha Women (ADFG) in Rio Grande do Sul and the Gaucha Association to Protect Natural Environment (AGAPAN) which was founded by a woman.

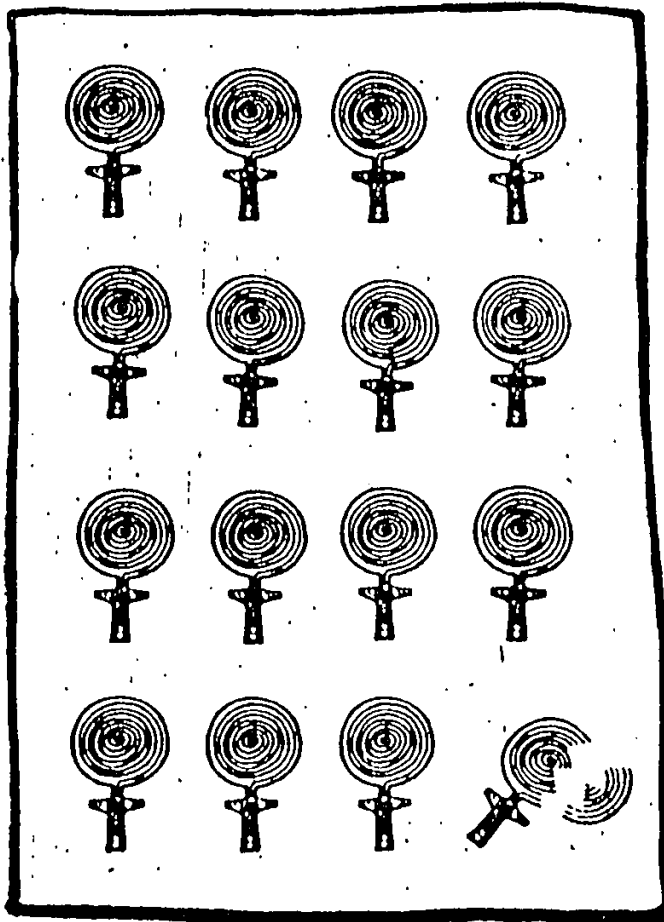
The political amnesty granted in 1979 brought back many Brazilians who had been in exile in Europe, where they had been in contact with the Green Parties, who had in their platforms not only environmental, but also feminist issues. Since the early 1980s, environmental issues became a political issue and found a close ally in the feminist sector.

In 1986 the Brazilian Green Party was founded and developed its agenda in close connection with the Workers Party. This represented a new, modern labor consciousness and included a number of other questions, including women's rights, in their platforms. Also that year, a national coalition of environmental groups formed, the National Encounter of Autonomous Environmental Entities (ENEAAAS). Since 1990, the environmental movement has shared with other Brazilian social movements (women, blacks, Indians, trade unionists, youth, rural workers, people caught by dams, etc.) the criticism to the model of development that Brazil adopted for four decades.

## **FEMINISM IN BRAZIL**

Feminism in Brazil as an organized social movement dates from 1975, when a seminar was organized in Rio de Janeiro under the auspices of the United Nations during the period of military rule. From then until the election of the first civilian President, Brazilian feminism grew as a social movement not only in terms of the number of groups organized to improve conditions for women, but as a new political culture that has pointed to non-authoritarian ways of exercising power.

Until 1979 no political party incorporated women's demands into its programs and women were forced to operate outside institutional channels. They focused on discrimination against women in the labor market, the absence of day care centers for women workers, the sexual stereotypes which lead to gender discrimination in education, the crucial questions of violence against women and reproductive health care. A feminist press was initiated and labor unions and professional associations incorporated these issues in their discussions.



"these trees are our heart  
these trees are our life  
One who will fell these trees  
will also cut us."

By the early 1980s, women's issues had become part of the public debate. More progressive political parties began to incorporate women's demands. There was yet no real link between feminists and environmentalists.

Redemocratization led to the establishment of Councils for Women's Rights, at the Federal, State and Municipal levels, to help implement demands from feminist groups for policies to fight violence against women, job discrimination, and in favor of day care. In 1985 the National Council for Women's Rights was established. The Councils, along with women's nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), participated in the formation of the new constitution during 1987-1988, and were successful in incorporating many provisions on social benefits, labor rights and reproductive health. Most of these, however, have yet to be made into specific laws.

In the late 1980s the National Council was disbanded because of opposition and budget cuts. Women's NGOs remain active.

## WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Analyzing the activities related to the environment of 35 women's NGOs in Brazil, most of the activities center on sensitizing women to seeing the environment as a citizen right and at understanding the link between poverty, environment and women. The other major concern of these NGOs involves reproductive health and new reproductive technologies.

Quality of life--access to proper sanitation and housing, the right to live in a health environment--is the link between women and the environment. While many women, especially poor women, have been the main agents in the struggle for a better quality of life, many of them do not perceive themselves as actors in the environmental field.

The frame of reference into initiatives on women and the environmental is very broad. It should leave room for the inclusion of specific questions related to female physiology, such as the relation between acid rain and abortion, of pollution and low weight of premature babies, of the work in certain pharmaceutical industries and its effects on menstrual cycles and fertility, of agrotoxics and birth defects. Issues of desertification, compulsive migration and its specific effects on women show that environmental degradation has both physical and social effects on women.

## **Population; Linking Women, Environment and Development**

Brazilian women's NGOs today are focussing on the discussion of population and the environment as population growth has been taken by many as the cause of environmental degradation. The policy implications of this thesis, particularly in a military regime, is an emphasis on population control rather than women's reproductive rights and health.

The dramatic decrease of birth rates in Brazil (the annual birth rate is down to 1.8 percent from 2.5 percent a decade ago) and the significant weight that sterilization has played in this decrease (some press reports say that half of all married women between 15 and 45 have been sterilized), have made the question of choice and the quality of care a crucial one. At the same time the fact that this decrease in population growth has not meant an increase in the quality of life indicates clearly that more complex analyses are needed, linking the prevailing development model to environmental degradation.

Supported by a strong international movement, Brazilian women have refused to surrender their right to make decisions about their own bodies to the rationale of population planners. Despite the differences among Brazilian women, they agree that high birth rates are not a cause of poverty but a consequence of it and that it is time to talk about the explosion of poverty, not population.

Government agencies have not yet incorporated gender as a variable to be taken into consideration in their programs. The Brazilian Institute of Environment (IBAMA) has two projects, however, which does: one looks at the working conditions of the 'marisqueiras', the women who dig molluscs. Carried out by the Nucleus of Women Studies of the University of Bahia (NEIM), it looks at both the protection of the mangroves and the creation of decent working conditions.

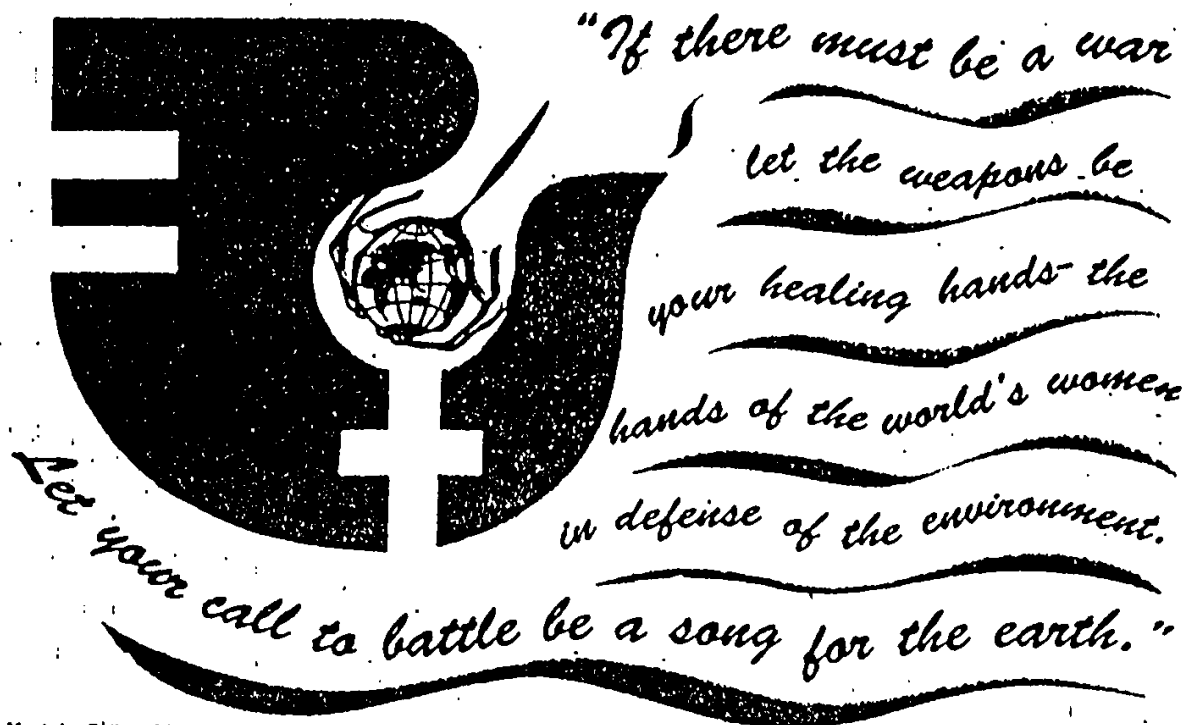
The other is related to the 'quebradeiras de Babacu' in Maranhao state. It focuses on women who earn their living by breaking coconuts, whose pits are used in food oil and soap industry. Farmers have been enclosing the babacus (areas where the coconuts grow). The women breakers have been persecuted and even killed, and the babacus ecosystems destroyed.



A new paradigm, referred to as 'eco-feminism' --has emerged that women's association with nature is a wealth, not a handicap. The proximity of women and nature is part of a process of reevaluation of the South and of a criticism of the 'civilizing' process of the North which has generated destruction of nature and of human beings and created societies of overconsumption, responsible for the pollution of their own environment and of developing countries.

Eco-feminism then emerges as an ethical claim against an immoral pattern of development.

*Excerpted with permission from INSTRAW News, the magazine of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW--No. 19, 1993). INSTRAW is an autonomous UN body which conducts research, training and information activities to integrate women in development.*



Moslela Tóiba, Director; United Nations Environment Programme, Nairobi, 1985

# **Violence Against Women in Haiti**

Violence against women in Haiti has increased since the 1991 coup, when the military took power. This violence includes the violence of poverty, which has forced many women into prostitution. There are reports of girls as young as 9 years old being kidnapped and sold to Dominican-run prostitution rings. Rape is also on the increase, with many of the rapes being committed by the Haitian military and the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti (FRAPH). A victim who has been twice gang-raped said, "The crime is that those who should be protecting us don't. They rape us instead."

In the last week of September, the InterPress Service reported that a coalition of U.S. and Haitian women's organisations called on the Interamerican Human Rights Commission to document and press charges in cases of sexual abuse of women by the Haitian military regime. The coalition's proposal included sworn statements by victims, like Alerte Belance, who was raped and attacked with a machete when FRAPH members burst into her home looking for her husband. "I am here to tell my story only because they thought I was dead," she told the Commission.

Belance said she was worried that the military would not be held responsible for their acts if the amnesty law included in the agreement between Haiti's military regime and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter is passed.

At a press conference, Rhonda Copelon of the Harvard Law School said the group seeks official recognition that rape and sexual abuse are common forms of torture in Haiti. "We want the Commission to send a research mission to avert future human rights violations. We ask that the international community disarm the forces involved in the campaign of terror," she said.

The following report by Anna Hamilton Phelan of Artists for Democracy in Haiti (reprinted from July 1994 *The Witness*, 1249 Washington, Blvd., Suite 3115, Detroit, MI, 48226-1822, US) explains how other women are fighting this injustice:

"In Haiti it is common to see naked male children, as the heat is oppressive. However, even in the sweltering slum of Cite Soleil, the genitals of female children are covered. This practice honors the 'birth part' of female as the 'pathway of life'. Such respect, people say, was largely responsible for there being so few rapes in Haiti.

"But that's changed. Since September 1991 when the democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted by a military coup, incidents of rape of women and girls have increased alarmingly. And these rapes have a specific purpose. My research



confirms the May 19 statement of the UN/OAS International Civilian Mission that “rape has emerged as a tool of political repression in Haiti.”

“I just returned from Haiti where, with the help of an anthropologist who has worked in Haiti for 10 years on women’s reproductive health, I was able to enter neighborhoods and videotape the testimonies of some rape survivors. All were assaulted by members of the military, the police or the newly formed anti-democratic political party known as FRAPH. Many were told during assaults that they were being raped because they or their male partners participated in democratic activities.

“The women who came forward took an enormous risk. They knew I could not help them to leave Haiti. They understood they would not be financially compensated. Because of the constant presence of FRAPH in these neighborhoods, I went in as a health care worker with a camcorder (small video camera) hidden in my bag. Women guarded the doors. When FRAPH members appeared, the women would sing, signalling to us to turn out the camera light and be quiet.

“In one account, Jacqueline’s husband was a pro-democracy activist who refused to remove Aristide’s poster from his wall. When the military came after him, he went into hiding. Jacqueline was living with her aunt when seven members of the military broke into their tin and cardboard shack. They accused her of knowing where her boyfriend was, voting for Aristide and being in the resistance. Then each man raped her. They told her they would return. Her aunt, afraid for her own safety, would no longer hide her. Jacqueline seeks shelter each night in the shacks of others.

“As unimaginable as the living conditions are for the poor of Haiti, the fear that engulfs them is worse, especially at night when the military takes to the streets in its trucks.”

# COUNTRY Profiles

## Brazil

Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world. Under the military government (1964-1985), Brazil also accumulated the largest foreign debt in the world--US \$121 billion. A constitutional process began in 1986, culminating in a new Constitution in 1988. Fernando Collor de Mello was elected President in 1990, the first directly-elected president since 1960.

**Economy:** Gross National Product per capita is \$2,540 (to compare, GNP per capita in the US is \$20,910). High inflation, with almost half the population living below the poverty line. Main exports are coffee, soymeal, sugar, orange juice, iron ore, steel products, motor vehicles, aircraft.

**Population:** 150.4 million (almost 75 percent live in cities). A little more than half the population is descended from European (mostly Portuguese) and Middle Eastern immigrants; out of perhaps five million indigenous people before the Conquest, approximately 250,000 remain. Almost six percent of the population is descended from African slaves; there is a large minority of Japanese-Brazilians.

**Languages:** Portuguese and many indigenous languages.

**Life Expectancy:** 66 years (to compare, life expectancy in the US is 76 years); in the poverty stricken Northeast and Amazon, 45 years.

**Infant Mortality:** in 1992, one Brazilian child under age five died every two minutes. Almost a quarter of all infant deaths in Latin America are in Brazil. More than half of all child deaths in Brazil take place in the Northeast, where the official under-five mortality rate (116 deaths per 1,000 births) is nearly double the national average.

**Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births 1992)**

Ireland (lowest in the world)	6
US	10
Cuba (lowest in Latin America)	11
Argentina	24
Brazil	65
India	124
Niger (highest in the world)	320

## **Bolivia**

Dolores de Vargas is a founder of Centro Integral de la Mujer, which organizes self-help groups for poor women. "In Bolivia," she notes, "we say that poverty has a woman's face. The lack of education and health care in my country matches Haiti. There is an article in our penal code which states that, if a relative, who lives in the same house with you, is violent towards you, it is only a crime if he causes 'grievous harm'. Rape is not a crime unless the girl is underage. In the rural areas, the girl is usually forced to marry the rapist--it is one way the man can force the girl to marry him. There is, of course, no such thing as marital rape. How can we speak about women's human rights when a woman does not have enough food or water?" Centro Integral de la Mujer is hoping to start documenting violence against women, and to perhaps start a shelter for battered women.

*Contact: Centro Integral de la Mujer, Casilla 1302, Tarija, Bolivia. Tel. 0591 66 45818/43032/32036*

Bolivia has the lowest life expectancy (54 years) in Latin America, and the highest infant mortality rate (105 deaths per 1,000 live births). It is considered Latin America's least developed country. Almost 65 percent of the people belong to the indigenous nations Aymara or Quechua. The gains made by miners and other workers after the 1952 popular revolution have been undermined by two successive right-wing governments. Women played a crucial role in the fall of Bolivia's last military dictatorship--it was the hunger strike of four women miners, during Christmas 1982, that inspired massive acts of civil disobedience around the country. The Women's Platform, founded on March 8, 1989, has initiated many programs to improve women's status--one of the most recent, organized around the slogan "Since I want Others to Respect Me, I Respect Others", raised public awareness about violence against women and the need for law reform.

Many peasants now depend on the cultivation of the coca leaf, and the US war on drugs has made their communities battle grounds. The population is seven million and GNP per capita is \$570.

## **Columbia**

Political life in Columbia has been dominated by the rivalry between the country's Liberal and Conservative parties: during the 1950s, the parties' power struggle resulted in the deaths of some 250,000 people. Amnesty International believes some 20,000 people have been killed for political reasons since 1986.

Ofelia Gomez works with a feminist group in Bogota, Columbia. "In Columbia women suffer violence at home, in the streets and in the media. This is an issue that touches us all. Since the 1980s the Colombian women's movement has tried to make violence against women visible. In the last few years this has become a topic of public discussion, but in a distorted way. The government has recognized the violence, but only because it effects the family and children, not because it effects women. Since 1991 there has been a movement to form a new Constitution. The national women's movement made several proposals, such as the free choice of maternity. (We are a Catholic country so we do not talk about abortion). We also proposed an article protecting female heads of households and against discrimination against women. Only the first proposal did not pass. We made a proposal against domestic violence which was brought up by women in Parliament. This didn't succeed either. We were told it was the only proposal to get laughs when it was discussed."

## **ARGENTINA**

Argentina, ruled by a small group of land and cattle owners, was one of the ten richest countries in the world in the early 1900s. The last military dictatorship (1976-83) led to brutal human rights abuses and a new word in the international vocabulary: the disappeared. Argentina's population of 31.9 million people includes the largest British community outside the Commonwealth and the second largest Jewish community in the western hemisphere. Argentina has one of the highest literacy rates in the world. GNP per capita is \$2,160.

## **PARAGUAY**

In 1865, Paraguay fought a war against Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay (The War of the Triple Alliance) which reduced Paraguay's population by half (from 450,000 to 220,000 in 1870). More war was to follow, this time against Paraguay's own people. General Alfredo Stroessner seized power in 1955 and ruled until 1989, during which time one-quarter of the population emigrated to Brazil and Argentina. Most of the population is mestizo, of both European and Indian background; while Spanish is the official language, most people speak Guarani, an indigenous language. In 1987, fundamentalist US missionaries from the New Tribes Mission were responsible for the deaths of five Ayoreo Indians. Violent evictions of Indian communities from their lands are common, as are conflicts between landless peasants and owners of large plantations. There are over four million people in Paraguay. The GNP is \$1,030 per capita.

# **FEMINIST GROUPS IN LATIN AMERICA**

## **BRAZIL**

Coletivo Feminista Sexualidade Saude (CFSS) is a feminist health action group, that provides training for women and professionals. They encourage self-help and offer information and health care around contraception, abortion, pregnancy, childbirth and women's mental health. Coordenadoria Especial da Mulher/Sao Paulo (CEM) is a municipal government agency that is looking at institutionalized violence around women's and children's mortality, and organizing actions against such violence.

Dr. Simone Grilo Diniz has worked with CFSS in Sao Paulo since 1985. "health institutions are strong, powerful agent of control over women's lives." She spoke at 1991 Center for Women's Global Leadership institute on "Women, Violence and Human Rights", on the whole range of the medical system's violence against women: forced sterilization, gynecological rape, compulsory motherhood, and the 'medicalization' of pregnancy and birth. In Sao Paulo, 98.5 percent of the women give birth in hospitals, but poor women frequently have to go from hospital to hospital during labor in search of a free bed. One maternal mortality survey in Sao Paulo documented a case of one pregnant woman in labor going to 11 hospitals before she was admitted. Once admitted to hospital, a woman has a 50 percent chance of undergoing a caesarian section and 15 to 40 percent chance of contracting a hospital infection. Often she is allowed no contact with the baby or with anyone she knows for hours.

Diniz says such treatment is institutional violence. She is developing a new epidemiology of violent death that takes into account any avoidable death of a healthy individual and in particular the death of women from avoidable complications of pregnancy, childbirth and battery. Lack of access to safe and legal abortion would be counted as 'violent death.' "denying a woman's right to decide whether or not to have a child is denying her status as a human being. Humanizing ourselves is gaining the right to decide about our own bodies." The reason why reproductive rights are not considered "human rights," she said, "is because men don't reproduce." CFSS, Pav. Pe. Manoel de Nobrega, sala 13-terreo, Cep-0498, Parque Ibirapuera, Sao Paulo-S.P., Brazil

## **COSTA RICA**

CEFEMINA, founded in 1975, is a non-profit women's organization in Costa Rica. CEFEMINA works in five major areas: violence against women, women's health,

women and the legal system, housing and environmental issues. It began its work against violence against women in 1984 by helping women leave violent relationships. They started self-help groups and community housing projects which are safer for women and involved women in their design and implementation. CEFEMINA, Apartado 5355, San Jose 1000, Costa Rica. Tel. 244620.

In Costa Rica one organization that works with young mothers reported that 95 percent of pregnant clients under 16 are victims of incest.

In another study of 1,388 women seeking services (not related to violence) at Costa Rica's national child welfare agency, one in two reported being physically abused.

## **VENEZUELA**

Venezuelan Association for an Alternative Sexual Education (AVESA) was founded in 1984. They have three programs: sexual education and consciousness raising; sexual and reproductive health; and services for victims of sexual violence. Their first task was to raise consciousness about violence against women. Now they are conducting research into penal law related to child abuse and teaching women's mental health. They are also working to legalize abortion, which is now permitted only if the life of the mother is in danger. AVESA, Avenida Francisco Miranda, Edif. Hollywood 3 #88, Chacao, Caracas 1060, Venezuela.





## **PERU**

Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristan (Women's Legal Rights Program) is a feminist nongovernmental organization which has played an important role in raising women's issues in Peruvian society since 1979. The Center works to develop awareness of gender consciousness and defending women's rights. They help to strengthen women leaders so they can develop local responses to violence as well as political proposals. The women's rights project provides legal services to victims of domestic violence and rape, training workshops for women police officers, and workshops on legal rights and citizenship for women. Centro de La Mujer Peruana Flora Tristan, Pque. Hernan Velarde 42, Cuadra 2 Av. Petit Thouars, Lima 1, Peru.

## **CARIBBEAN**

Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) was founded in 1985 to meet the communication, information, research and solidarity needs of women's activists and organizations in the Spanish, English, Dutch and French-speaking Caribbean. They carry out regional action/research programs which are developed collectively, on issues of concern to the regional women's movement. The Women and Law Project produces popular education materials on legal issues affecting women; develops training programs for organizations whose work brings them into contact with women with legal problems; and organizes national consultations in the region. Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, (publishes CAFRA News), P.O. Box Bag 442, Tunapuna Post Office, Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies. Tel. 809 633 8670.

## **A SAMPLING OF LATIN AMERICAN/CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S GROUPS WORKING AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

- Lugar de la Mujer, Corrientes 2817 Piso 5 "B", 1193 Buenos Aires, Argentina. Tel. 961 8081.
- Belize Women Against Violence Movement, P.O. Box 1190, Belize City, Belize. Tel. (02) 74845; fax (02) 77236.
- Center for Information and Development of Women in Bolivia, Casilla 14036, La Paz, Bolivia. Tel. 37 4961

- A Violencia Domestica, Instituto de Acao Cultural, Rua Visconde de Piraja 550, sala 1404, Ipanema 22410, Rio de Janiero, Brazil.
- Isis Internacional, Casilla 2067, Correo Central, Santiago, Chile. Tel. 225 3629 or 490 271.
- Casa de la Mujer, Apartado 36151, Bogota, Colombia. Tel. 248 2469.
- National Coordinating Committee of Salvadoran Wpmen (CONAMUS), Apartado postal 3262, Centro de Gobierno, San Salvador, El Salvador. Fax (503) 262 080.
- Comit  Latinoamericano para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer, Honduras (CLADEM-H), P.O. Box 3124, Tegucigalpa, d.c. Honduras. Tel. 22 0674; fax 31 7073.
- Say No to Violence! Sistren Theatre Collective, 20 Kensington Crescent, Kingston 5, Jamaica.
- Red Contra la Violencia Hacia las Mujeres, Xola 1454, Colonia Narvante, Deleg. Benito Juarez, C.P. 03020 Mexico, D.F., Mexico.
- St. Lucia Crisis Center, P.O. 1257, Castries, St. Lucia, West Indies. Tel. (809) 31521.



International Women's  
Tribune Centre (IWTC)

# EVICCTIONS IN CROATIA

*(Editor's note--the following article was written before the scheduled October 3 eviction. On October 3, many prominent people, including Members of Parliament, showed up and the authorities postponed the eviction.)*

by Kathryn Turnipseed and Vesna Kesic

On September 28, police in Zagreb evicted a woman and her two children from her flat, using physical violence and verbal assaults against the 60 people who had come to protest this action. This was a case of business as usual for the Croatian Ministry of Defense that has pursued a policy of "reclaiming" flats that formerly belonged to the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) without due process or protection of the legal rights of the residents.

Under the rule of Croatian democracy, over 5,000 flats throughout Croatia have been "reclaimed" by the government in this manner. Between 15,000 to 20,000 people have been thrown onto the streets. The government has tacitly approved the evictions of people of Serbian ethnicity, including women who years ago divorced former JNA officers and women who stayed in Croatia although their husbands left after the outbreak of war. Some people faced public harassment and were fired from their jobs. They fled from their apartment without resistance, while others had their homes blown up. In other cases, police and/or soldiers used physical violence, intimidation (e.g., threats, carrying a gun), and ethnic and gender based slurs, like screaming "You are a Chetnik whore!" There are cases of residents protesting such actions through the court system and receiving favorable judgment that the police ignore.

State officials have "justified" evictions on the grounds that they need to provide apartments to Croatian soldiers, invalids and widows. Under socialism, the state or companies issued apartment rights to people to live in state or company owned property. These rights were analogous to ownership, as they were inheritable and exchangeable. Tudjman's government passed a decree on July 24, 1991 that invalidated all transactions involving JNA-owned property. This decree was issued during a moratorium (summer 1991) when no decisions were allowed concerning independence or Yugoslav state-owned property. Officials use this decree to argue the state's right to evict people in Zagreb, Split, Pula, Osijek and other locations.

While popular opinion persists that it is "only Serbians" that are being denied their legal rights, the reality is that ethnicity is not a determinant of evictions. At a press conference on July 12, Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, claimed "Only, and exclusively, evictions are being done on the basis of court decisions. You mustn't forget

mostly these people who are evicted are people who are directly or indirectly involved in aggression against Croatia." Ninety percent of the evictions are not supported by a court order. Tudjman's assertion of "indirect involvement" suggests, contrary to principles of law, that "guilt" can be transferred from one family member to another, to people who worked in JNA hospitals or to anyone granted apartment rights by the JNA. It is widely believed that the Ministry of Defense is taking advantage of the unclear legal situation to accumulate property.

Women and children comprise the majority of persons being evicted. Women are subjected to intimidation and physical abuse by policemen and are subject to gender-based harassment. At Wednesday's eviction a woman attempted to stop a policeman from hitting her by claiming to be pregnant. The policeman replied, "You are so ugly who could fuck you, someone can fuck you only if they cover your face with a blanket." Police called another woman, who is married to a Muslim man, "a mujahadeen whore," and beat her with their fists.

The majority of evicted people are unable to afford private accommodation and must move in with family or friends. After the police have evicted a family, Croatian soldiers move their belongings into storage (which must be paid for by the family). A social worker then appears to offer to place children in an orphanage: this is the only support provided by the government.

Dom ("Home"), an association of citizens directly effected by these actions, and human rights activists are campaigning against evictions. Following the eviction of the D. family on September 14, in which the police forcibly removed the 34 peaceful protesters and arrested 13 men and women, Ms. Vesna Bernadic (DOM) and Ms. Draga Krstecanic (Anti-war Campaign) started a hunger strike in front of Parliament. They demanded a halt to evictions from flats without court decisions; a review of all cases by the Constitutional Court, the establishment of a neutral judicial commission to address the problem; and the establishment of the Court for Human Rights that the Croatian President promised in 1992. Some opposition party members supported this action, while officials dismissed the demands. The strike, called off for health reasons after ten days, raised visibility and popular support for DOM.

On September 26, 60 people showed up to protest the eviction of Mrs. M., including friends, family, journalists and activists from DOM, Citizens Committee for Human Rights, the Anti-War Campaign, Center for Women War Victims, BaBe, Otvorene Oci, Zagreb Women's Lobby, and other human rights organizations. More than twenty policemen were ordered to use force to remove people from the apartment. Policemen hit and kicked many of the protesters, including those who were handcuffed. Police took away cameras to expose the film, ordered people not to write notes and to leave the parking lot outside the apartment. Thirteen men and women were arrested, including

Mr. Dragan Hinic of the Serbian Peoples Party and member of Parliament, who in solidarity refused his "diplomatic" immunity.

Following this well-publicized peaceful resistance to police violence, the Parliamentary Human Rights Commission has invited representatives DOM and other human rights organizations to discuss the evictions on October 5.

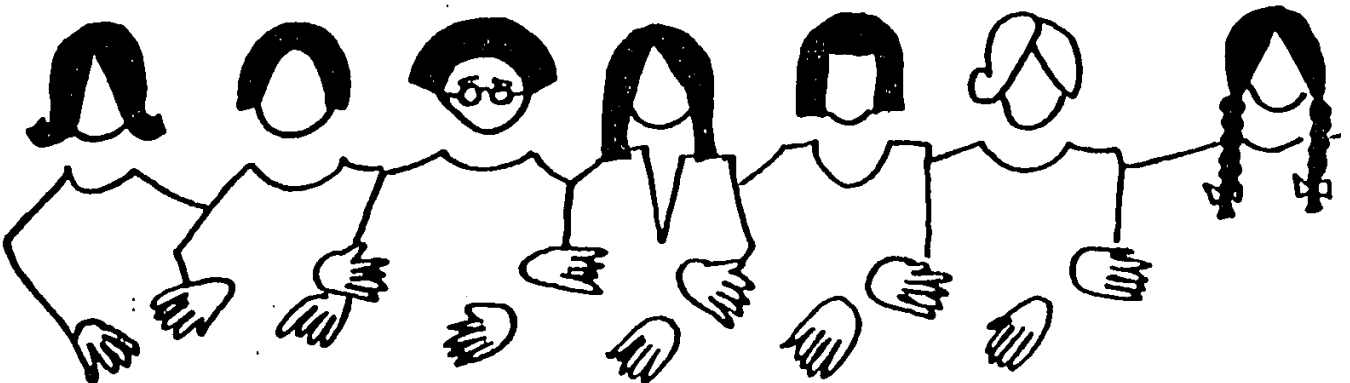
A family in Zagreb is scheduled to be evicted on October 3. Activists will protest and expect that police will continue the policy of using violence to remove people from the apartment. On October 5 a family in Split will be evicted following a judgment that they are illegally occupying a flat which was given to them by the JNA. Since August the family has been forced to live in their apartment with Edo Aljinovic, a soldier who forcefully entered the apartment with a tank of gasoline and a bomb. Aljinovic claimed the apartment was his on the basis of a Ministry of Defense "decision" granting him the right to the apartment, before the appropriate office had decided that the apartment belonged to the Ministry of Defense.

You can protest these actions by writing to:  
Nikica Valentic, President of the Croatian Government, fax # 385 41 277082.

Copies of these letters and messages of solidarity should be sent to: Coordination of Croatian Human Rights Organizations  
and DOM, fax # 385 41 271143. Email [ARK\\_ZG@ZAMIR-ZG.ZTN.ZER.DE](mailto:ARK_ZG@ZAMIR-ZG.ZTN.ZER.DE)

*Kathryn Turnipseed and Vesna Kesic work with the women's human rights group, B.a.B.e (Be active, Be emancipated), Petreticev Trg 3, 41000 Zagreb, Croatia. Tel/ Fax +385 41 419 302. Email: [BABE\\_ZG@ZAMIR-ZG.ZTN.ZER.DE](mailto:BABE_ZG@ZAMIR-ZG.ZTN.ZER.DE). Watch for more information about B.a.B.e. in the next WRI Women's Newsletter.*

International Women's  
Tribune Centre (IWT)



# WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

by Shelley Anderson

*"I want to avert the end through work. Through work by healthy men. Thanks to that the ghetto exists...The Germans wouldn't keep a ghetto for women and children for very long; they won't give them food for one extra day."*

Jacob Gens, leader of the Jewish ghetto in Vilna

Forty women gathered for a study weekend around the theme of "Women as Victims of Structural Violence: the Holocaust and ex-Yugoslavia" in early June, near Amsterdam (the Netherlands). Each woman comes with her story--there is a pastor, wondering if she should accept a position as a military chaplain; a Filipina student, angry at the violence of poverty; a German educator from Ravensbruck, the Nazi concentration camp for women; a Dutch nurse, now in her 70s, who still remembers the German occupation of her country; an Amsterdam social worker who shocks the group by saying, "I work with survivors of the Shoah (the Holocaust). They tell me their grandchildren are coming up to them, asking them how they survived. The grandchildren are telling them, 'We must know, because it begins to happen again.'"

The women came with stories, and they left with more stories. And even more questions.

## WOMEN AND THE SHOAH

"I'd been teaching about the Holocaust since 1968. One morning in 1978 I woke up and asked myself, 'Where were the women in the Holocaust?'" So Joan Ringelheim, Research Director of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, began her story. "How did women survive? Did they survive better than men? There was a great deal of hostility towards looking at these questions, perhaps because many were unable to accept that in the Holocaust there was a great deal of sexual humiliation and brutality" from all sides against women. "A Jewish woman survivor once told me that she had had two enemies: 'Nazis and men.'" Ringelheim said.

Ringelheim said no one will ever know how many people died. But she cites figures from operations by special mobile Nazi death squads, lists of deportations from ghettos: 44 percent killed of those killed during six months of one unit's work were women, 28 percent children; 62 percent of those deported from the Lodz ghetto in 1942 were women, mostly younger women.

More women died than men, Ringelheim believes. She offered few explanations as to why this might be so: in the early days, when escape was still possible, more men than women fled. Children made women's escape harder; many also believed that Jewish men were the target, not Jewish women and children.

What of survival? What helped women survive could also destroy them: many survivors, male and female, commented on the intense emotional relationships women made in the camps, and in resistance groups. The relationships helped the women live, but could also prove emotionally devastating if a friend or comrade died.

## **IN EX-YUGOSLAVIA**

The weekend also looked at the situation in ex-Yugoslavia for women, and particularly at the mass rapes. What is unusual about ex-Yugoslavia, Ringelheim said, is not the fact of mass rape in war, but the fact the world paid attention to it. A representative from *Vrouwen voor Vrede* (the Dutch Women for Peace) said there are perhaps 20,000 documented cases of war rape in ex-Yugoslavia. Estimates of how many women were actually raped range from 200,000 to 500,000. The chances of a war crimes tribunal where rapists would be tried grow slimmer and slimmer.

## **ZENICA MEDICA**

Women resist the violence in ex-Yugoslavia. Women in Black in Belgrade persist in vigiling against the killing, and provide support for war rape survivors. In Croatia, women have built a place of healing. Zenica Medica is a small building, a rebuilt children's nursery, where a staff of 40--nurses, gynecologists, psychologists--themselves survivors--and other health care workers deal with the physical and emotional scars of women and children war victims. Vrouwen voor Vrede has raised £200,000 (approximately US \$100,000) in the Netherlands for the project. The money has helped Zenica Medica acquire two cottages, where women with severe trauma can stay and become economically self-sufficient by tending small garden and raising chickens.

## **RESISTANCE**

In some attempt to bring hope to the stark brutality, presenters throughout the weekend pointed out that women were not passive victims. Some women inmates in Auschwitz risked their lives to smuggle tea spoon after tea spoon of gun powder out from their



forced labor at an armaments factory, until there was enough to blow up a crematorium. Another woman, a young Jewish dancer, forced to strip in a selection line, flung her clothes at an SS soldier, grabbed his gun and shot two guards, while other women in the group attacked guards with their bare hands.

Those are the ones we know about. There are others. "Dr. Janusz Korczak is a hero," said Ringelheim, of the respected pedagogue from the Warsaw ghetto. "He had a chance to escape the ghetto, but decided to go with the orphans under his care to Treblinka. But you never hear of Stefania Wilezyska, who had managed the orphanage since 1911, who actually cared for the children, and who also chose to go with them to Treblinka. You learn nothing of her or the other six women who went with the children. Something that is seen as ordinary behavior for women becomes heroic when a man does it."



## THE FUTURE

Someone once said that silence was the only appropriate response to the Holocaust on the part of those who never suffered through it. Silence feels to me like only a partial response. Silence from shock at the horror, yes; silence as part of listening deeply to the survivors, yes; silence because no one who has not gone through a similar experience can presume to comment, yes. But silence will not prevent genocide or the gynocide of war rape. Only action can do that. To act means we must speak, as loudly and as clearly as possible: war is a crime against humanity. Never again.

## RESOURCES:

- The 13-minute video '*War Crimes Against Women*' is an excerpt from what will be an hour-long video. Contact Mandy Jacobson, Bowery Productions, 108 Bowery, #6, New York, New York 10013, US. Fax +1 212 343 1338. A copy (European system) can be requested from the Tiltenberg, Zilkerduinweg 375, NL-2114 AM Vogelzang, the Netherlands. Fax +31 (0)2520 24896.
- *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, edited by Alexandra Stiglmayer (University of Nebraska Press, 1994, \$14.95 paperback), includes interviews with survivors, testimonies and essays which explore the many facets of mass rape and war. Published in 1993 in Europe as *Massen Vergewaltigung: Krieg gegen Die Frauen* (Kore, Verlag GmbH, Drei Königstr. 6, D-7800 Freiburg, Germany).
- *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, edited by Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, Paragon House, New York, US, 1993.
- Autobiographies and diaries of women survivors: *Prisoners of Fear* by Ella Lingens-Reiner; *An Interrupted Life* by Etty Hillesum; *None of Us Will Return* by Charlotte Delbo; *I Am Alive* by Kitty Hart; *Playing for Time* by Fania Fénelon.



# Building North-South Bridges

*Integrities* is the newsletter of a US-based nonprofit group called IF. IF works to empower women in both the South and North through its CAPACITAR program, which helps support soup kitchens and human rights groups in South America and the Families of the Disappeared in Honduras. The following are some of the projects the women of IF help to support.

A group of 23 families who call themselves the Seeds of Peace Community have been virtually homeless since 1988 when they were evicted from a plantation where they had worked for decades. The plantation owner evicted them when he discovered they were holding meetings to organize a union and demand better pay and working conditions. They worked for less than 50 US cents for 12 hours a day. After the shock of being homeless and jobless wore off, they began to look for land on which they could build a new life together. They found some land in Petapa and asked the local affiliate of the International Union of Food and allied Workers' Association for help in buying it. The union negotiated a loan of US\$ 7,000. They now work the eroding mountain land and live in shacks of scrap wood and metal, branches and plastic. IF is raising money to build (estimated at \$850 to 950 each) better housing for the community.

Last year IF also initiated a program in Lima, Peru, with '*comedores populares*'--community kitchens. The Comedor movement was initiated by Sister Magdalena Castro over ten years ago in Ermitaño, a poor area of 90,000 people in Lima. One participant, Esther Arce, says, "I never thought I could do anything but take care of my family and try to survive starvation and poverty. But Sister Magdalena taught us how to organize, how to cook together, how to learn together to survive and to recognize our dignity, talents and strengths as women." Some 67 percent of Ermitaño (where the average monthly income is \$35) poor families are comedor members. Because of structural readjustment programs, many professional families (who earn \$60-100 per month) now belong to the comedor. There is now a federation of 54 comedors in Ermitaño, and a National Federation of Comedores was formed in the mid-1980s, giving the women political clout.

Esther is the president of the comedor in Sarita Colonia, which feeds 35 families each day. The comedor is over 10 years old and owns its own pots and pans and stove. Although most of the women are illiterate, through the comedor they learned how to keep accounts, make financial reports, work with diet-related health problems and create delicious meals with poor ingredients.

CAPACITAR also sponsors Women's Journeys of Interchange and Solidarity to Guatemala and Nicaragua. IF, 3015 Freedom Boulevard, Watsonville, CA 95076, USA.

# NEWS

## Books for Namibia

In addition to producing regular radio shows and writing workshops for women, the Women's Resource Center in Namibia publishes the 28-page magazine *Sister Namibia* (in English, Afrikaans and local languages) six times a year. Begun in 1989, the collective is committed to the elimination of sexism, racism, homophobia and other issues that oppress and divide women.

"Our office," they write, "is situated in Capital Centre, room 806, Windhoek, and has a small library with books, magazines, and studies by and about women. Any woman who is interested to develop her writing skills, or who wants to be part of an independent, non-party affiliated and dynamic women's group is welcome to join our team on a voluntary basis."

They look at issues like parental preference for boys, violence against women, non-traditional work for women and AIDS (subscriptions are N440 inside Africa and US \$30--or pound sterling or German mark equivalent--elsewhere). Send subscriptions to Sister Collective, P.O. Box 40092, Windhoek, Namibia. Tel. +264 61 230618/230757; fax +264 61 36371. They are also interested in donations of feminist and lesbian books. Donations may be sent to the Women's Resource Center, c/o E. Khaxas, P.O. Box 3723, Windhoek, Namibia.

## NEW GROUP IN BRAZIL NEEDS SUPPORT

A group called *Estação Mulher* (Woman Season), with an office in Sao Paulo, has been established. "We decided to form such a group because lesbians throughout the world, mainly in the so-called Third World, are completely ignored in statistics and in any research carried out by governmental or nongovernmental health departments. This leaves lesbians unassisted with HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, drugs and many other problems due to the prejudice against homosexuals in our society. This is even more serious because Brazilian health policy is not that organized. It is difficult for anyone to get medical assistance and even more difficult for those who do not feel free to express their sexual option. *Estação Mulher* intends to gather multidisciplinary professionals such as psychologists, lawyers, sociologists and medical doctors to provide women, especially lesbians, for the complete assistance they need, in a way that they can feel free to express their own problems without being afraid of the sexual stigma of Brazil's homophobic society.

“We need financial support as well as information. It is unreasonable to expect financial support from the Brazilian government, so we would like information about both funding and publications your group may issue...” Contact: Estação Mulher, Caixa Postal 62 631, CEP 01295-970, São Paulo-SP, Brazil.

## **LATINA LESBIAN PUBLICATIONS**

*Las Buenas Amigas* began in November 1986 when a group of Latina lesbians in the New York area, some US born, others immigrants from Latin America, met. Open to any Latina lesbian, the group meets the first and third Sunday of every month, from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm at the Gay and Lesbian Center, 208 13th Street, New York, New York 10011. The *Las Buenas Amigas* newsletter (in Spanish and English) reaches over 300 Latina lesbians and includes essays, fiction, poetry and reports of activities. The group has conducted workshops on lesbian mothers, legal rights, internalized racism, safe sex and more. “Within the last year, *Las Buenas Amigas* have undertaken the challenge of expanding their operations both within the gay and lesbian community and the Hispanic community. For this purpose we have organized an educational retreat, a photography project, and an expanded version of our newsletter. While these activities have been greatly successful, we find that the only way to continue our work is by increasing our funds.” If you have ideas about possible financial support, please contact *Las Buenas Amigas*, c/o The Center, 208 13th Street, New York, New York 10011, USA, or call Carmen +1 201 868 7816.

*Connoción: revista y red revolucionaria de lesbianas latinas* is a new publication and network for Latina lesbians. *Connoción* accepts writings and graphics in Spanish and English and costs US \$13 a year (for three issues) for individuals inside the US, \$23 for those outside (airmail). They would also appreciate more information on funding agencies for their projects: *Connoción*, 1521 Alton Road #336, Miami Beach, Florida 33139, USA. Tel. +1 305 751 8385.

## **SEND A GIRL TO SCHOOL**

To attend a school in Nicaragua costs about \$50 per year, which is too much for many families. Friends of Cantera is looking for sponsors (individuals, families or schools) who are willing to put a child through a year of school. Contact Friends of Cantera, Niño a Niño program, 918 Benton, Santa Rosa, CA 95404, USA. Tel. +1 415 851 1730.