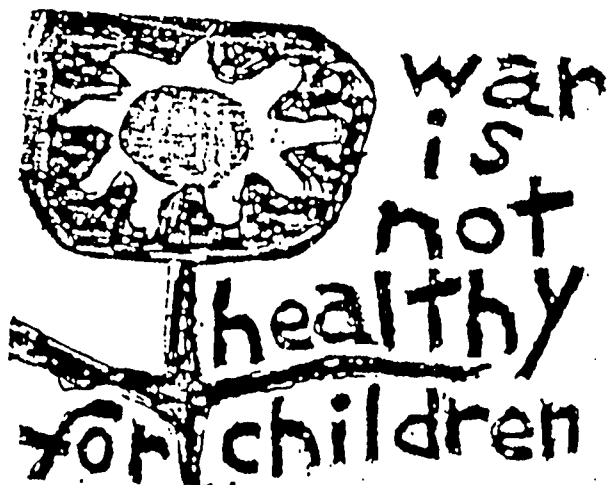


No 19
June 1995

WRI WOMEN



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



News from Chechnya, Turkey, Cambodia:
Celebrating 50 Years
of Women's Resistance to War

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
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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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It's Good TO HAVE FRIENDS

In the small Dutch city where I live, several hundred people took part in yesterday's annual silent walk to commemorate the victims of World War II. There were far more people than usual taking part, as this year marks the 50th anniversary of the end of the war in Europe. As I watched the silent line of people filing past, laying flowers in front of the war memorial, a litany of names sounded in my head: Bosnia, Rwanda, Burma, East Timor.... The "victory" of World War II did not stop the biggest killer of all, that of war itself. The "victory" did not stop fascism, as the mounting murders of immigrants and black Europeans by skinheads proves.

I participated in the walk, not to lend credence to any nationalist mythos, as much of the hype around the 50th anniversary is doing, but rather to acknowledge past suffering. To acknowledge the wounds that for many people still have not healed, and to recommit myself to the struggle to stop war. That will be the real victory. That is the way to honor the dead.

It is easy to feel hopeless when we read in the paper that Zagreb is being bombed, that fascists in the US killed children in Oklahoma City. Last week, after hearing about the attack on Zagreb, the WRI Women's Working Group sent a message to B.a.B.c., a women's group in that city, whose work you have read about in past issues of this newsletter. "We are okay," the women emailed back. "Thank you for your message. It's good to have friends. We are scared, but we shall overcome!"

What gives me hope is knowing that women all over the world are struggling to stop war. The war may be undeclared, like the sexual violence we face daily, or it may involve landmines or even economic sanctions. A little of this struggle against war, very little, is reported in the following pages. I hope it fuels your determination, rather than increasing any sense of hopelessness. What gives me hope is knowing that the women in our WRI Women's Working Group, in our networks and next door, are not giving up. It's good to have friends, and we will indeed overcome.

Shelley Anderson

P.S. Please remember that the WRI office's telephone number (and others in different parts of the UK) has changed: the new number is +44 171 278 4040; the fax number is +44 171 278 0444. The correct email address is warresisters@gn.apc.org

MOTHERS' MARCH TO GROZNY

A peace march of mothers of Russian soldiers began at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow, Russia, on March 8. The participants offered flowers in front of the memorial to all the victims of the Chechen war. Mothers who had been to Chechnya in attempts to save the lives of their sons read poetry about their experiences. Each marcher then expressed her or his commitment to not use violence, even in self-defense. The Mother's March for Life and Compassion is demanding the immediate end of the war in Chechnya. Initiated by the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, the entire march will take about five weeks.

Marchers arrived at Mineralnyie Vodi on March 18, where authorities from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) checked participants identity documents and threatened to stop the march indefinitely. After a delay, all the participants were allowed to proceed by train to the city of Nalchik. Before reaching this city however, the march was stopped once again. The marchers were asked to leave the train by local authorities, and told that a bus would drive them to Nazran, Ingushetia, where the Ingush president had expressed full support for the march. The bus did not take the marchers to Nazran however, but to a Russian army base. The marchers insisted on being taken to Nazran, and were eventually transported there.

This is not the first time the march route has been changed because of the authorities, and the marchers' activities restricted. The national press continues to cover this anti-war action, however, and marchers hope to begin walking from Nalchik to Grozny on March 23. Over 300 people are expected to join the marchers in Nalchik. Humanitarian aid is being sent with the marchers, and Chair of the Committee of Soldier's Mothers, Maria Kirbassova, has planned meetings with Chechen and Russian representatives to negotiate the release of prisoners. Women from Grozny work with march organizers to try to escort orphans out of the city.

The Mothers have tried to help survivors of a massacre of Samashki. At least 300 villagers were killed by Russian troops there in early April. Representatives of social and human rights organizations managed to enter the village only 8 days after the attack began. From 10 to 15 April only Chechen women were allowed in and out of the village. By this time all corpses had been cleared away or buried. Members of the Mother's March for Life and Compassion stood at the check point where inhabitants left the village to neighbouring village Sernovodsk.

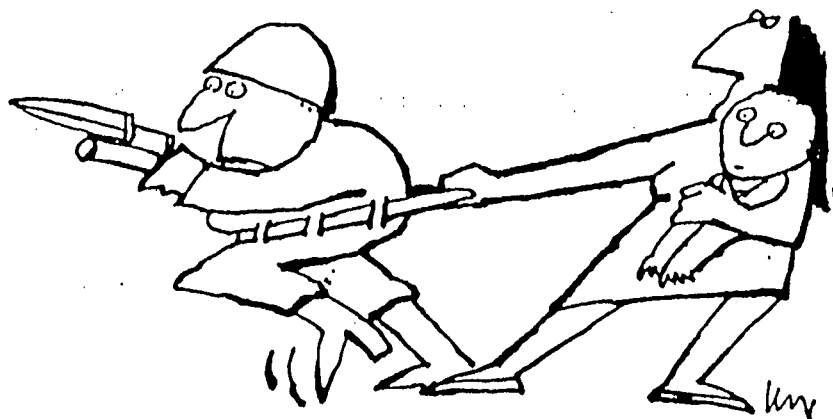
On 12 April, a Russian parliamentarian, Anatoli Shabad, well-known for his courageous attempts to reveal the truth of the Chechen war, entered Samashki with a bus full

of women, dressed in women's clothes. He reported what he saw at a press conference in Moscow, in an attempt to counter media propaganda about the war.

Many of the wounded in Samashki received no medical treatment for 3 days. Russian Forces first attacked with bombs from the air, starting at 7pm in the evening 7 April, continuing throughout the night. Snipers were also used. Eyewitnesses reported that Russian soldiers would enter the courtyard of each house. According to most reports, they would demand that the men came out of the houses. Many were shot on the spot. Others were ordered to undress to the waist, beaten and rounded up. Several hundred Chechen men were transported to camps at Assinovskaya in Chechnya and Mozdok in North Ossetia, where they received severe beatings.

Mercenaries, minimum age of around 30 years, were employed to carry out the attack on Samashki. Villagers of Samashki reported seeing Russian mercenaries shoot into houses with machine guns, burning cars and stores of grain and hay. Many people sought refuge in their cellars. In many houses the soldiers threw grenades into cellars packed with women and children who were hiding from the attack. One woman told a Quaker Peace and Service representative how soldiers had thrown her seven-year old son before a moving armoured personnel carrier. After it had run over him, the woman was forced to pick up her son's body. They poured petrol into her house and ordered her to light it. She couldn't do it, and so the soldiers fired into the house, which burst into flames.

Reports from various sources, including assistants to Deputies of the Russian State Duma and elders of Samashki, state that up to 300 inhabitants of the village were killed during the attack. Many women and children are among the dead. Stanislav Gavorukhin, head of the Russian State Duma Investigation Committee on Chechenya, visited the



village 14 April. He was shown around by inhabitants of the village. They talked of their ordeal and showed him evidence, including the remains of people who were burnt alive. On returning to Sernovodsk, he told inhabitants and members of the Mother's March for Life and Compassion that what he had seen was awful and must be communicated urgently to Moscow.

16 April, on national Russian national television news, a statement written by three organizing groups of the Mother's March For Life and Compassion was read. The text described some of the atrocities which Russian Forces committed in Samashki, including the burning of people and killing of women and children. The presenter announced that there was another view on what happened in the village, and proceeded to interview Stanislav Govorukhin. He stated that what was written in the text was lies and 'propoganda of Dudayev' distributed by the Russian Committee of Soldier's Mothers, the Chechen Women's Organization. He stated that nobody had been burned, victims of the attack amounted to a few women killed, and that he had seen only a few destroyed houses.

"One thing is certain," a Chechen mother said, "we don't want to live under those Russians anymore. How can we trust them ever again?"

On 14 April the first Congress of Chechen women was held in Sernovodsk. The women and other groups of the Mother's March for Life and Compassion discussed ways to continue the nonviolent movement to demand peace in Chechnya. Over 300 people were present. On 21 April the Mother's March for Life and Compassion continued when mothers and other marchers walked through the centre of the Chechen capital Grozny. Chechen women, Buddhist monks, Russian soldier's mothers and Quakers demanded peace in Chechnya and the withdrawal of Russian Forces from the area.

Fifteen representatives of the Chechen Women's movement from all over Chechnya arrived in Moscow on 29 April. Three representatives from the Committee of Ingush women arrived a few days earlier. They tried to speak to journalists, representatives of Russian and international NGOs and embassies about the mass destruction of lives and violations of human rights in Chechnya. Many of the women have lost family, relatives and friends. Two of the Chechen women witnessed the massacre in Chechnya.

Donations for the Mothers' March, marked "Caucasus", can be sent to: account name Quakerhilfe, Bad Pyrmont, number 568603, Postbank Frankfurt, Germany (bank code 50010060); checks payable to 'East-West Relations Committee' (marked 'march') can also be sent to EWRC/PaYM, c/o Jule Harlow, 1163 Auburn Dr., Davis, CA 95616, US; in the Netherlands contact Maria Koojman of the Help Chechnya Committee, tel. +31 (0)2902 61877. Contact: Quaker Peace and Service, ul. Akademika Koroleva 9-2-243, 129515 Moscow, Russia. Tel/fax +7095 2543496; email: qps@glas.apc.org

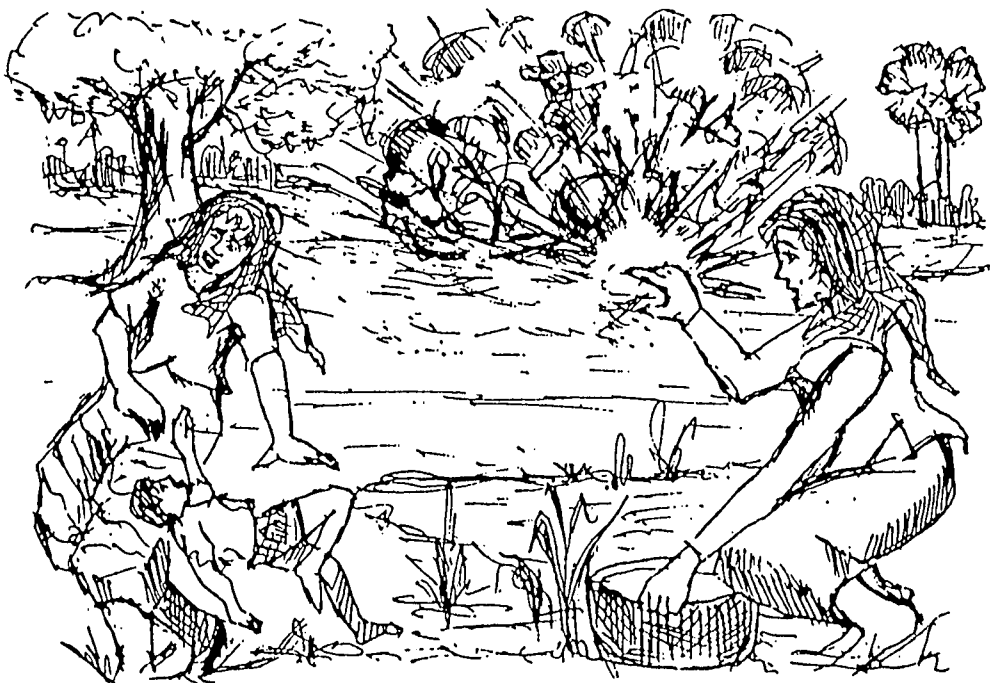
WOMEN WEAVING THE WORLD

Last November 1,000 women from every province in Cambodia came together for a display of traditional skills. The display also kicked off the "Women Weaving the World Together" project, with Khmer women connecting pieces together they had woven, to form a ribbon one kilometer long. Organizers hope to collect 20 kilometers of cloth (from pieces one meter wide, of any length, and from any fiber) from individuals and groups around the world. The ribbon will be sent to the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. Organizers hope to raise US\$ 50,000 for a women's project fund as well. For a flyer in English or Khmer about the project, contact IFOR, or Khemara, National Road 5, Mittapheap Village, Russey Keo District, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Tel/fax +855 23 60134 or +855 23 26009.

The Khmer Women's Voice Center held a seminar February 23 on landmines and their impact on women and children (proceedings are available in Khmer and English from Khmer Women's Voice Center, 14 E1 Street, 322-51 Bang Keng Kang I Chamcar Mon, Phnom Penh, Cambodia). Another conference was held recently on domestic violence. The landmines seminar was moved to receive a letter from four Italian trade unionists who worked at Valsella Meccanotecnica, a landmine manufacturer. The women had organized a successful effort to stop the factory from producing landmines. "Working in Valsella was all right," the Italian women wrote. "We were not aware that what we produced caused such tragedies. When peace groups showed the damage the landmines we produced were provoking, we knew we had to be in the front line to ban these weapons, and to demand initiatives for the conversion of the companies and demining. Unfortunately, many people working at Valsella cannot yet understand that we have the right to work producing things that are useful, not deadly, for others. We will continue our fight; we believe if we stop fighting, Valsella will immediately go back to producing landmines again." The Khmer women's video center is producing a five-minute video on the effects of landmines on women for the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing

LANDMINES CONFERENCE

An international landmines conference, "The Human and Socia-Economic Impact of Landmines: Towards an International Ban", will be held June 2-4 in Phnom Penh,



Cambodia. Cambodia, with a population of 8.5 million, has an estimated 10 million unexploded landmines and 25,000 to 30,000 amputees. Participants will hear testimonies of landmine victims, watch demining teams and visit hospitals and rehabilitation centers. The conference hopes to mobilize regional groups to become more involved in the campaign to ban landmines, and so will include workshops on campaign networking and advocacy, using the media, etc. Newcomers to the issues, and those who would like to start campaigns, will find the conference invaluable. To register, contact: Ali Ramsay, GPO Box 1112, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Tel/fax +855 23 60480; email: landmines@pactok.peg.apc.org

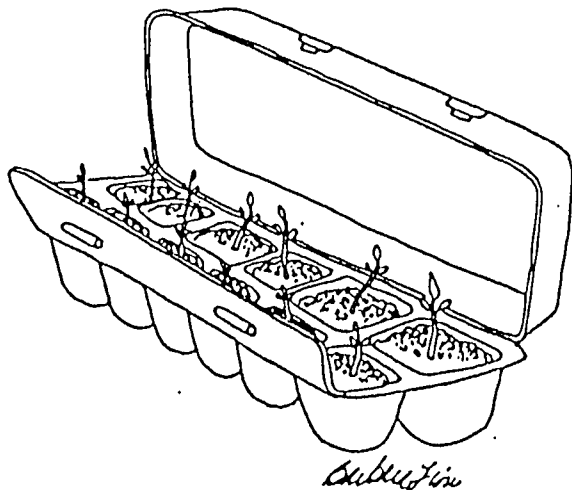
THE WAR CONTINUES

Heavy fighting has been reported in several provinces in Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge, the political faction responsible for the deaths of perhaps one million Cambodians between 1975 and 1979, is gaining support. There are several factors in the growing support for the Khmer Rouge. A sizeable percentage of the population is too young to remember Pol Pot's atrocities, while widespread government corruption has alienated many. "There are about 300 bridges from Phnom Penh to my home in the countryside,"

explained Bob Maat, a founder of the Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation (CPR). "At every bridge there will be a government soldier, demanding five or ten dollars before I can cross the bridge. Even old people who lost family during the Khmer Rouge time say it wasn't as bad then as it is now. The Khmer Rouge also plays on Cambodians long historical hatred of the Vietnamese, stating that when they are in power, they will kick the Vietnamese out. Most importantly, perhaps, is the fact that the government ignores the needs of the rural poor, who make up the bulk of the population."

In February, CPR helped organize a seminar on Buddhism and environmental protection for local nongovernmental organizations and foreign guests. CPR is also helping to organize the fourth Dhammayietra. The fourth Dhammayietra, a traditional walk for peace and to spread the Buddha's teachings, will take place in May. It will begin on the Thai border, where Cambodian walkers will meet with a group of Nipponzai Myohoji monks and nuns, on May 8. The members of this Japanese Buddhist order are on an Interfaith Pilgrimage for Peace and Life; they began the pilgrimage in December at the former Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz, and will end the pilgrimage in Hiroshima in August, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of that city. Together, the walkers will spend about three weeks crossing Cambodia, to arrive on the Vietnamese border on June 1. Dhammayietra organizers took part in a nonviolence training by George Lakey and Karen Ridd recently, as a first step towards developing a training for all future Dhammayietra participants.

CPR, which has worked mostly with monks and nuns for the last five years, is now concentrating its work in the western province of Battambang, encouraging community groups, especially women's groups, in their efforts. Contact: CPR, Wat Sonpeou Meas, P.O. Box 144, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Tel. +855 236 4205; fax +855 232 6400; email: cpr@pactok.peg.apc.org



KURDISH WOMEN IN TURKISH CITIES

by Fatma Karahan

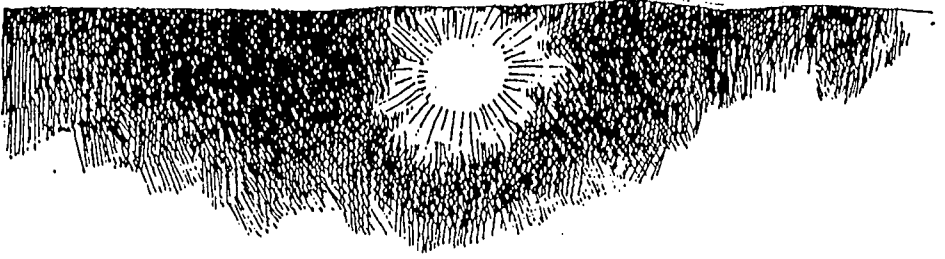
Especially lately, many women from Kurdistan have had to leave their homes with their husbands or fathers because of pressure from the Turkish government, or for economic or other reasons. They come to Istanbul, where they find themselves in a foreign culture, with a different language. These Kurdish women in Turkish urban areas confront many problems.

In May 1989, a group of Kurdish women made the first survey of such women in Turkey. The survey consisted of 48 questions, which aimed at showing the women's experiences. Significantly, the problems we encountered in conducting the survey itself reveals much about the conditions Kurdish women confront. It was extremely difficult to carry out the interviews without the permission of the women's husband, or another male head of her family. Before anything else, we had to persuade the men that the survey was important, for without their consent the women would never relate the difficulties they experienced. Thus, apart from the more abstract fear of getting in trouble with the state, the women's reluctance to speak came directly from the men in their own households. When Hatice, from Batman, for example, told her husband about the interview, he was so angry that she called us in a panic to cancel her interview.

The survey includes 148 Kurdish women of different ages and occupations. Eighty one percent of the women knew no Turkish when they first arrived in the city. They experienced a total sense of estrangement and felt they could not even go outside alone.

In answer to the question "What is your mother tongue?", 81.1 percent said Kurdish, 12.8 percent said Turkish, and 6.8 percent responded both languages. The respondents who had forgotten the Kurdish language were mostly women under age 25, who had been born in Istanbul or who had a non-Kurdish mother.

About 68.5 percent of the women interviewed lived with their mothers-in-law, especially during the first years of their marriage. This percentage was greater than expected. It shows that the extended family tradition which prevails in Kurdistan is also continued in urban areas. Some 87.6 percent of the women aged 30 or older were married to a kinsman or hemseri (someone from the same place of origin). It is very rare for Kurdistani women to marry foreigners; there are many problems to confront if they do. Although families on both sides object to this kind of marriage, Turkish families in particular do not want a Kurdish daughter-in-law. They call Kurds "dirty, rude, rough".



DOES PEOPLE'S BEHAVIOR CHANGE WHEN THEY LEARN YOU ARE KURDISH? IF SO, HOW?

Over 72 percent of the interviewees said that there was a negative change. "They start to laugh at me with contempt", "I am regarded as secondary", and "They humiliate me" were some of the responses. "We have neighbors who don't even talk to us", "They harass me, curse at me", and "I was beaten by three people at school because I am Kurdish", "I am labelled as ignorant" were other answers. Some 26.36 percent said they noticed no change in others behavior. These people were mostly under age 25 and had grown up in Istanbul.

BERDEL--BRIDE PRICE

We then asked about berdel (the exchange of women for a bride price), an old Kurdish tradition which still prevails in Istanbul. Eighty nine out of the 148 women surveyed were married. A bride price had been paid for 12 of these women, who were mostly 40 years old or older. Apart from this, ten women said they had been married in berdel fashion.

HOW DID YOU MARRY?

Although it changes according to age groups, 87.6 percent of the women said they had not chosen their own husband. Their families had chosen their husband for them. Only 12.4 percent of the women had met their husbands beforehand and decided to marry them. When the women's educational level, their economic dependency, and the importance of traditional values, the tragedy of involuntary marriage, from which it is extremely hard to extricate oneself, becomes even more striking.

DIVORCE

Only four of the 148 women had been able to obtain a divorce. Over 75 percent answered "yes" to the question "Do you think that couples who do not get along should get a divorce?". Most women in the worse conditions felt they should resign themselves to the situation and did not even consider divorce. Even those who looked upon divorce as a viable option were not successful in obtaining a divorce.

Division of Labor in the Household

The women considered this question trivial. Sharing the housework was not even considered as an issue in such an oppressive situation, when they had to ask their husbands' permission to do anything. Seventy of 148 the women surveyed were housewives. Five said that their husbands helped them on a few occasions, usually when the wives were ill. Among the 39 women working outside the home, six said their husbands shared the housework, with only one saying this was on a fifty-fifty basis.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Show Your Solidarity

Messages of solidarity and concern are always appreciated. You can write, fax or email many of the women's groups in former Yugoslavia that you have read about in past issues of this newsletter. The booklet "Adressen von Friedens-Frauen-und Menschenrechtorganisationen im ehemaligen Jugoslawien" ("Addresses of Peace, Women's and Human Rights Organizations in Former Yugoslavia", in English and German) is an good source of information about contacts with women's groups in the area. It is available for DM 3 from the Bund für Soziale Verteidigung, Marienwall 9, D-32423 Minden, Germany, tel. +49 571 29 456; fax +49 571 23 019; email: C.Schweitzer@bionic.zer.de. You can also make a donation to Women's Aid to former Yugoslavia, 20 Tennyson Road, Portswood, Southampton, SO17 2GW, UK.

KEEP ANKARA WOMEN'S SHELTER OPEN

After reading an announcement in the Turkish newspaper *Cumhuriyet* that the Ankara women's shelter may be closed by local authorities, women's shelters in Hamburg, Germany began an international action for letters of support. The women, both immigrant and non-immigrant, ask that protest letters be written to Turkish authorities. The letters should request that the women's shelter be allowed to continue its work. The Ankara women's shelter has been threatened with closure since the last local election in March 1994.

Messages of support can be sent to: Kadın Dayanisma Vakfi (Organization for Women's Solidarity), tel./fax: +90 312 310 06 70. Addresses for protest letters: Kadın ve Aile İşlerinden Sorumlu Devlet Bakanı (Minister for Family and Women), Aysel Baykal, Basbakanlık, Ankara; and to TC Basbakanlık-Kadının Statüsü ve Sorunları Gen. Md., Mesrutiyet Cad. 19, Kat 4-5-7, Bakanlıklar, Ankara, Turkey.

NEW EMAIL CONFERENCE

A new conference on the defense of abortion clinics in the US has just opened up on Peacenet: <women.clinicdefense>. Clinics where abortions are performed in the US have been fire bombed, health care providers killed, and patients harassed.

The conference organizers write, "The conference will include, but is not limited to, information, discussion and analysis of the attack on women's reproductive rights, especially at abortion clinics. We hope that this forum will allow us to provide timely, accurate updates. We also want to include information on the Christian right-wing and Christian Identity/Patriot movements. Also, information on militias, neo-Nazi and White supremacists groups that may impact on women's rights. And, finally, we want this conference to include other related reproductive rights issues. This conference is sponsored by the Bay Area Coalition for Our Reproductive Rights."

WRITINGS BY REFUGEE WOMEN SOUGHT

"The Suitcase: Refugee Voices from Former Yugoslavia" is a collection of stories, essays, poems and letters from Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian refugees in Pakistan, Germany, Italy, Croatia, Serbia, Hungary and the US. Writings about beginning life in a new country are particularly sought, but submissions from refugees on any topic are welcomed. The book will be published in the US and Europe, with proceeds going to refugee and humanitarian groups chosen by the contributors. Writers may email the co-editor, Julie Mertus, at JULIE.MERTUS@ZAMIR-BG.ZTN.ZER.DE or fax +38 111 637 670, or Ellen Geiger, Curtis Brown, 10 Astor Place, New York, New York 10002, US.

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S PEACE CAMP

A national women's peace action and festival took place at the Australian Defence Industries munitions factory in Benalla, in the northeastern part of the state of Victoria, April 14-16. "The action at Benalla was an opportunity for women to voice our opposition to Australian militarism and its role in regional and global conflicts," said organizer and WRI Women's Working Group member Margaret Pestorius. "Women are often the people who suffer the most in a conflict. We need to challenge the culture of violence which allows the continuation of war and violence in all its forms." Benalla was chosen as a munitions plant opened there in March. Women from the Centre for Nonviolence, c/o Commonground, were very active in organizing the festival and camp. Centre for Nonviolence, c/o Commonground, P.O. Box 474, Seymour 3661, Australia. Tel/fax +61 057 938 257 or 057 938 400.

REFUGEE WOMEN ON THE THAI-BURMA BORDER

Mary is a statistic. She is a Karen, one of the largest minority groups in Burma. She is also a refugee, forced to flee her home near the rebel capital of Manerplaw when it fell in late January. The 46-year old civil war in Burma has created at least 100,000 refugees along the Thai-Burma border; the recent fighting has increased that number by 10,000 people. Mary belongs in this latter number.

Mary does not see herself as a statistic, nor does her community. She fled in the middle of the night with very little except her five children. Despite the urgency, she also found time to make plans for the safe evacuation of a large loom. She and a few other Karen women had been using their skills in traditional weaving to earn money for their families with that loom. The Indigenous Women's Development Center (IWDC), set up two years ago by another Karen woman refugee, had made arrangements with Oxfam, the British development agency, to sell the pillow cases and sofa coverings they wove. The loom represented much needed cash for Mary's family, but also something more: a link with the outside world.

In the new camp at Mah Rah Mu Klo, on the Thai side of the jungle, Mary helped to organize the Karen Women's Development Organization (KWDO). They were tired of not being heard by the camp's male leadership, and decided to initiate projects that the men were ignoring. They surveyed the 5,000 or so inhabitants in the camp, to find out how many women were pregnant and how many traditional midwives were among them. They tried to make sure that every family had at least two blankets and one cooking pot. Worried about the children, who have been unable to go to school since November 1994, the women of KWDO organized a summer school, where children between the ages of six to 14 were given classes in hygiene, singing, drawing and sewing.

Mary and the other women of KWDO were trying to do something for themselves. They were fixing the precious loom, excited because another order from Oxfam had come. An IWDC staff person had travelled four miles by bus, then three hours in a borrowed jeep up the mountain, in order to tell them that Oxfam wanted to buy 50 pairs of trousers. Despite the uncertainty of not knowing how long they would be in the camp, the women accepted the order.

They didn't know how long they would be in the camp because State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) troops had been coming over the border, to kill or kidnap



Karen refugees. “We asked the Thai soldiers (who operated a check point, which kept out journalists, at the entrance to the camp) if they would protect us against SLORC,” said one older woman. “They told us to run if SLORC came.”

SLORC is the military dictatorship which rules Burma. SLORC has been provoking religious conflict among the Karen. While the majority of Karen are Buddhist, most of the Karen rebel leadership is Christian. SLORC has exploited tensions between these two groups, and given financial and military support to a breakaway group of Buddhist soldiers called the Democratic Kayin (Karen) Buddhist Organization (DKBO). After Manerplaw’s destruction, SLORC declared the DKBO the governing authority in Karen State.

As it turns out, the women were wise to be uncertain. On the afternoon of 25 April, 200 SLORC soldiers entered Mah Rah Mu Klo and burnt down 170 houses, leaving over a quarter of the camp homeless. They also burnt a rice storage hut. The rainy season is coming soon, turning the logging trail that is the only way into the camp into a muddy sea. There will be no way to get food in or out of the camp during the rainy season, so the loss of the rice means people are going to go hungry.

Two refugees died fighting the soldiers, who left after about 40 minutes. The soldiers took with them almost 100 hostages, using them as a human shield. The hostages included a woman who had given birth four days before. They left a message that they would return in a few days and burn the rest of the camp down.

That message has been repeated. Not just at Mah Rah Mu Klo, but at other Karen camps inside Thailand, that have been attacked by both SLORC and DKBO troops. Refugees are kidnapped and brought back to Burma. The refugees who stay in Thailand are told that the soldiers will come back, to burn the rest of the camp and kill anyone who stays behind. Kamaw Lay Ko was attacked the same day as Mah Rah Mu Klo. Three days later Baw Nah was attacked with mortar shells and machine guns. Homes were again set fire to. An 18-year old woman, who had been wounded by shrapnel, tried to hid under her house. The DKBO set fire to her house, which collapsed, burning her to death.

News reports never gave the name of this woman. She was just another statistic.

ACTION

Please write to:

the Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai
Office of the Prime Minister
Government House
Nakhon Pathom Road
Bangkok 10300
Thailand.

Express your concern for Burmese excursions into Thai territory. Ask him to reconsider Thailand's policy of constructive engagement with SLORC, and instead to facilitate a substantial dialogue between SLORC, ethnic leaders and the democratic movement led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, in order to find a political solution to Burma's problems. Appeal to him and to UNHCR representative Ruprecht V. Armin not to promote a strategy of relocating Burmese refugees into concentration camps, but rather to extend more humanitarian aid and protection to them. Lastly, ask him to guarantee independent bodies access to the camps so that they can monitor the situation.

Book Review

Learning True Love: How I Learned and Practiced Social Change in Vietnam by Chan Khong, 258 pages, 1993, US \$16 paperback. Parallax Press, P.O. Box 7355, Berkeley, CA 94707, USA.

reviewed by Shelley Anderson

This book by Vietnamese Buddhist nun Chan Khong (formerly Cao Ngoc Phuong) will be of interest to many people: to peace activists, to researchers in women's studies or those interested in women and Buddhism, but perhaps most of all to everyone interested in women activists. It is a simply written and completely engrossing account of one woman's life. Sr. Chan does not like to describe her memoirs as an autobiography, as it is not her story alone that she describes. Nevertheless, **Learning True Love** is a very valuable addition to a too-small category of writings--the lives of Asian women, telling their own story.

Born in 1938 to a middle-class Vietnamese family, Phuong was greatly influenced as a child by the generosity and kindness to others of her grandparents and parents. She reflected this upbringing as a girl, when she would spend her pocket money on buying noodles for street children. Defying tradition, she was sent first to an all-girls school and then to university for an education. It was while studying science at the University of Saigon that Phuong's interest in social change really developed. Along with her classes, she worked in Saigon's slums, setting up day care centers, arranging for medical care, distributing rice and helping to educate the children.

This interest in politics came naturally, too. The war with the French colonialists was raging as she grew up; her father, detained when Phuong was seven, was almost killed at one point. The suffering caused by war could be seen all around. Phuong would frequently try to enlist the help of Buddhist monks in her work to relieve this suffering, only to be told that social work was 'merit work' that would never lead to enlightenment. "Even though Catholics are in the minority in our country," she would ask monks, "they take care of orphans, the elderly, and the poor. The Buddha left his palace to find ways to relieve the suffering of people. Why don't Buddhists do anything for the poor and hungry?" She was told that she should reach enlightenment first, then work for the poor; if she practiced hard enough, she might be reborn as a man, then, perhaps dozen of lives later, a bodhisattva (an enlightened being, or a buddha). "I did not want to become a man, or even a Buddha," she wrote about this period of her life. "I just wanted to help the children whose suffering was so real."

In 1959, Phuong was to meet a monk with a different answer. The meeting would change her life. Thich Nhat Hanh was a radical young monk who coined the phrase 'engaged Buddhism'--social action based on Buddhist principles. Thich Nhat Hanh (or 'Thay'--'teacher', an informal word many Vietnamese use to address a monk) encouraged her work for social change, saying that enlightenment could come by living daily life in the deepest, most mindful way possible. He also explained his own work in village development. "From that day on, I knew he was the teacher I had been looking for," she writes. Slowly, a group of other university students formed, under Thay's leadership. This group continued working in Saigon's slums and established night schools for poor workers, while continuing to study Buddhism.

The work grew increasingly difficult as the war between south and north Vietnam increased. By 1963 the south's Diem regime, controlled by Roman Catholics, declared that the Buddha's nativity could no longer be celebrated as a national holiday, and outlawed flying the Buddhist flag. Protestors, including many students, monks and nuns, were arrested and tortured.

Phuong's work in the underground nonviolent resistance to this-- and to the Diem regime's many other human rights abuses, and to the war itself--would ultimately mean exile for her. Throughout the suffering--the murder of her co-workers, the self immolation of her friend Nhat Chi Mai, the repeated bombings of medical clinics and schools she had helped to build--Phuong takes refuge in Buddhist teachings and in her social activism.

Her commitment to both sustain her through her work in the early 1970s with Thich Nhat Hanh as part of the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation to the Paris peace talks; through their later efforts to save Vietnamese boat people; and in her continuing work with the Hungry Children Committee, which continues working in poor communities in Vietnam. Phuong lives now as an ordained nun in Plum Village, a Buddhist retreat center in France, where she teaches meditation and directs the work of the Hungry Children Committee, providing scholarships for poor Vietnamese children, and establishing mobile medical teams to help villagers.

Learning True Love saddens and inspires in turns. There is tremendous sadness at the waste and suffering of the Indochina war; there is also great inspiration at what one determined woman can accomplish. **Learning True Love** is a handbook for anyone who wants to learn how to remain calm in the midst of suffering, who wants to address the world's pressing problems by being in the world, but not overwhelmed by the world.

For information about Sister Chan Khong's work, write to : Hungry Children Committee, c/o Plum Village, Meyrac, 47120 Loubès-Bernac, France.

NEWS

ON THE MOVE

The international feminist network Isis-WICCE (Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange) has moved from its office in Switzerland to Kampala, Uganda. The group's next exchange program between feminist action organizations, scheduled for early 1996, will focus on "Freeing Ourselves from Violence: Mechanisms for Change". The program will look how specific mechanisms for monitoring and ensuring accountability for women's human rights can be developed. Applications are due June 1, 1995. *For more information contact Isis-WICCE, Box 4934, Kampala, Uganda, East Africa. Tel./fax 256 41 268 676.*

NEW FILM ON WITCH PERSECUTIONS

'The Woman Betrayed', a new 40-minute documentary by Sehjo Singh, interviews three women believed to be witches in different parts of Bihar and West Bengal, in India. The film won the special Juoros Award for 1994 at the Earth Vision Environment Festival in Japan.

"Women who are helpless or hated by society for one reason or the other are often branded as witches and become the scapegoats of the society's anger and frustration," stated Singh in a recent interview. "All through my research and during the shooting of the film, I found that witch hunting reaches a new height each time there is a crisis in society."

One of the women interviewed was a labor leader of coal miners. She testified in the film that witch hunting intensifies whenever there were prolonged periods of hunger and unemployment. Another interviewee was an indigenous widow who was struggling to retain her dead husband's land. Under customary law, male relatives of the husband will inherit the land once the widow dies.

INDEPENDENT PRESS UNDER ATTACK

Among the latest victims of Algeria's war against women are Rachida Hammadi, 32, and her sister Meriam Hammadi, 36. Rachida, a television journalist, was investigating activities of Islamic fundamentalists. Her sister worked as a secretary at the same state

television company. On their way to work in March, gunmen drove by and shot them, killing Meriam immediately. Rachida was shot in the head and is in a coma. Some 30,000 Algerians have been killed in three years by Islamic underground or government forces, including 37 journalists. 200 other journalists have left their homes and gone into hiding.

TURKISH WOMEN SEEK INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

Although the constitution of Turkey states that women and men are equal before the law, other laws clearly discriminate against women. Husbands have the legal right to determine where a family can live and the final say over children. Women must also have the permission of their husbands in order to ask for a passport. Turkish women have collected 100,000 signatures demanding an end to such legal discrimination. The Turkish group Women for Women's Human Rights now seeks international support for a similar petition campaign. For more information and a copy of the petition, contact Women Living Under Muslim Law, Boite Postale 23, 34790 Grabels (Montpellier), France, or fax Women for Women's Human Rights at +90 216 3851262.

Changes in punishable offenses in Turkish schools were announced February 6 by the Ministry for National Education. Under the new rules, bringing pornographic magazines to school was no longer an offense, but losing your virginity (if you're a girl) was. The new rules allowed headmasters to send "suspicious" girls for a virginity check (a practice whereby unmarried girls are stripped searched to see if their hymen was still intact). Girls who were no longer virgins could be expelled from school. Teachers in Izmir, and the Izmir medical association, protested the new regulation, as did parents. Objections seemed based not so much on the fact that virginity checks violate young women's bodily integrity, but rather on the increased authority of headmasters. The Minister for National Education repealed the regulation on February 9.

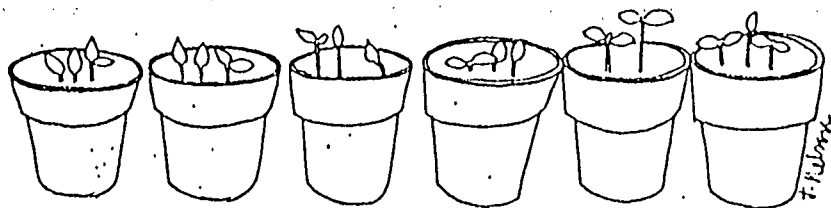
Sisters of Venus, the first and so far only Turkish lesbian group, was established in Istanbul in July 1994. The group is cooperating with a women's project to compile a report on women's legal situation in Turkey. A comprehensive report on lesbians' legal rights will appear in this report. Sisters of Venus has also become part of a world-wide project on AIDS, started by the World Health Organization. They are planning to start a Health Care project, and are working with the AIDS Prevention Association in Istanbul to prepare education material on AIDS for Turkish women. They are interested in contacts with other feminist and/or lesbian groups, and in information about possible funding sources. Contact: Sisters of Venus, MBE: 165 Kayisdag Cad. No. 99, 81043 Ziverbey, Istanbul, Turkey.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Making Women Matter: the Role of the United Nations (Zed Books, 7 Cynthia St., London N1 9JF, UK) is a comprehensive look at UN treaties and conventions about women, with recommendations as to how the UN can be used in the struggle for equality.

Lola Press is a new feminist news magazine, with editorial offices in Berlin, Montevideo and Windhoek. She appears twice a year, in English and Spanish, and is published by the German feminist funding agency Frauenanstiftung. "Lola Press", Friedrichstrasse 165, D-10117 Berlin, Germany. Tel/fax + 49 30 609 3719; email: Lolapress@ipn-b.comlink.de

Violence against women is a deadly disease, with more women dying each day from sex discrimination and violence than any other form of human rights abuse. That's the conclusion of an excellent new Amnesty International report **Human Rights Are Women's Rights**, available from AI's International Secretariat, 1 Easton St., London WC1, UK....**Violence Against Women** is a new quarterly English-language magazine. While aimed at researchers and academics, it is still interesting for the general public: Sage Publications, 6 Bonhill St., London EC2A 4PU, UK. Tel. +44 171 374 0645; fax +44 171 3748741....A report on the same issue, **Violence Against Women in Eastern and Central Europe**, gives more practical advice for activists, with a country-by-country status report. This is a report on the 1993 workshop of the same name organized by the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (HCA). Cost US \$7 from HCA, Milady Horakove 103, 16000 Prague 6, Czech Republic....



MARCH 8 ACTIVITIES

March 8, International Women's Day, was celebrated in a variety of ways around the world. In Turkey, the women of Izmir Savas Karsitlari Dernegi (ISKD--the Izmir War Resisters Association) produced Dario Fo's play "The Rape", and held a discussion afterwards with the audience. The women joined with other organizations to march on March 11, rather than March 8, in order to increase participation.

WRI Women's Working Group member Beena Sebastian, Chair of the Cultural Academy for Peace in Cochin, India, organized an Indo-Tibetan Forum for Women's Human Rights on March 8. The day brought together representatives from Indian women's organizations and Tibetan women exiles in Cochin. Participants drew up a resolution to be submitted to the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. The resolution states that the Forum was held "to highlight the plight of the Tibetan women who have to face severe stress due to separation from home, family, uncertain income, lack of proper accommodation, unsettled future, etc. Women in general face a lot of discriminatory practices--it is more so if one is living in exile as the Tibetan women." It calls upon the Beijing conference to protect the human rights of women.

At the UN World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, the US President's wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, announced that the US will spend US \$100 million over the next 10 years to improve women's education in less developed countries. The Summit itself announced a world literacy campaign for



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women as a first concrete step towards eliminating poverty. Outside the Summit, women activists began a hunger strike to demand an end to poverty and debt relief. The UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros Ghali, also announced that the UN plans to increase the number of women employed at the UN to 35 percent by the end of 1995.

In **Rwanda**, women commemorated March 8 by remembering the victims of the country's deadly civil war. Many Rwandan women are survivors of war rapes. In South Africa, a driver of a truck displaying a Hustler pornographic magazine sign showing naked women was arrested, while in Mogadishu, hundreds of women demonstrated, demanding peace in Somalia.

In **Taiwan**, members of the Women's Party celebrated with a public ceremony marking the day and the founding of the Women's Party. The Women's Party also nominated for its candidates for Taiwan's first presidential election next year: Chen You-chun and Li Mei-lien for President; and Hsiao Hsiang and Wang Chao-ying for vice president. In **Mongolia**, the 76-member parliament passed a law at end of February which merged International Women's Day with Children's Day on June 1. Gandi, one of the three women members of Parliament said, "I am totally against this change. Women should not be seen as mothers only. We should keep this day as a symbol of our demand for equality, but we have become the minority of the minority." The move was allegedly to curb increasing alcoholism by cutting the number of holidays that provide opportunities for heavy drinking.

Last but not least, in **Scotland**, the prestigious newspaper "The Scotsman" renamed itself "The Scotswoman" for the day. It was the first time such a name change had happened in more than 100 years of the newspaper's existence.