

# SIREN

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## UN Decade For Women Ends: BUT THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

Caribbean women participating in the N.G.O. Forum to mark the end of the UN Decade for Women have concluded that with the notable exception of Cuba, the material conditions of women of their region have regressed in the last ten years. On the other hand the major achievement of the Decade has been the greater consciousness and organization that Caribbean women have developed.

These were two of the main conclusions endorsed by a group of 21 Caribbean women's organizations who met on Wednesday, July 17, 1985 at the Chiromo University Hostel Nairobi, Kenya to review the Non-Governmental Organizations.

At the Forum, workshops on the Caribbean were sponsored by womens organizations of Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago and one regional grouping. Two other workshops set up by unknown "Caribbean" organizations were taken over and successfully conducted by participants themselves who raised the real

genuine problems facing women of the Caribbean.

Participants consistently focused upon worsening economic and social problems affecting Caribbean people. The staggering foreign

debt, the harsh conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund, the deepening inequality in the terms of trade with developed capitalist countries -

*Cont'd on P. 12*



### DE DECADE

"Fi we Caribbean sista dem did a meet in Nairobi last month fi reason 'bout woman situation. Dem put out a statement weh seh dat de best achievement weh we woman mek in de las' ten years is, 'The Greater Consciousness and Organisation That Caribbean Woman Have Developed'. On de odder hand dem seh dat dis get counteract by de fact dat fi we material condition a get worsen and worsen."

"It really get worsen fi tru. In fact my Granny tell me seh tings gawn so far

backwards dat it worsen evan dan what it was after dem abolish slavery. For she tell me seh dat fi her granny tell her seh dat when dem abolish slavery, nearly every woman did a wuk and nearly every woman coulda get fi grow lickle food fe eat. Nowadays, none a wi cyaan get wuk and when you go inna shop or supermarket di price a de food so high you can only look pon it."

"It look to me like fi dem 'restructuring' directly a tek place pon toppa woman back -- unless when dem done abolish primary school and hospital and put up price, dem a go close dung disease and old people and pickney to. (Me neva hear seh dat in dem plan.) So a mus' we

*Cont'd on P. 12*

# CARIBBEAN POPULAR THEATRE EXCHANGE

Representatives of SISTREN, THE JAMAICA SCHOOL OF DRAMA, CARIBBEAN CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES, GRADUATE THEATRE COMPANY, SELF THEATRICAL COMPANY and THE JAMAICA SCHOOL OF DANCE have joined forces to bring together Caribbean groups involved in Popular theatre, in an exchange of skills, ideas and traditions.

This CARIBBEAN POPULAR THEATRE EXCHANGE, as the project has been called, is due to get underway in Jamaica by the end of August. Caribbean groups which have confirmed they'll be joining the Jamaican participants include CABILDO from Cuba, the BELIZE WOMENS ORGANISATION (BOWAND), LAS ESCLAVAS DEL FOGON from the Dominican Republic and the EASTERN CARIBBEAN POPULAR THEATRE ORGANISATION.

The guest director is JEAN SMALL and ELEANOR WINT, Jamaican ethno-musicologist is the musical director. TONY HALL of the CCC's Popular Theatre Programme will also take part.

A workshop programme using the collective creation method and developing towards performances in urban and rural communities where SISTREN and GTC have established links, is the main activity of the month-long project. Other activities will include Master classes on the popular theatre process by CABILDO and the exposure of the Caribbean visitors to Jamaican cultural forms such as JONCUNNU and DINKI-MINI.

The content of the workshop programme is based on the development of the labour movement in the Caribbean and the position

of women within it. The project will utilise material researched by SISTREN's Artistic-director, HONOR FORD-SMITH and Resource Person, JOAN FRENCH, for a history project sponsored by the INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL STUDIES in HOLLAND.

The workshops aim to examine the development of the labour movement in the Caribbean during the 1930's. Important aspects of this will include the regional impact of Garvey's return to Jamaica in 1927 and the 1938 all-island uprising. They will also deal with the topic of migration into Jamaica after World War 1 and during the 1930's Depression.

CAROL LAWES of the GRADUATE THEATRE COMPANY is

the project coordinator. Asked about the significance of the upcoming event, she said, "This is the first time that such a broad grouping of Caribbean nationals has come together to collectively create a theatre piece born out of the regional experience."

She noted that during the 1970's the UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES (UWI) ran summer schools in the arts where similar groupings came together. However for the main part they worked with material that was already scripted.

"They neither worked with collective creation as a process, nor focussed on a particular subject as we are doing." said Carol. ■

## INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS

### BRIDGETOWN, BARBADOS



*Bev Hanson — guest M.C. at Caribbean Celebrations cultural show.*

BEVERLY HANSON represented SISTREN at a "CARIBBEAN CELEBRATION", held at Marine House, Bridgetown, Barbados from March 29-31. CARIBBEAN CELEBRATION gave regional Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) the opportunity to come together and thrash out a common position to be put before the Nairobi Conference which will bring the United Nations Decade of Women to an end (see story, Page 1).

### MOSCOW, SOVIET UNION



*Rebecca Knowles as Sister Francis in Q.P.H.*

As we went to press, REBECCA 'BECKY' KNOWLES, was in Moscow, Soviet Union, representing SISTREN on the Jamaica delegation to the 12TH WORLD FESTIVAL OF YOUTH AND STUDENTS.

The Jamaica delegation was led by the Chairman of the NATIONAL PREPARATORY COMMITTEE (NPC), MR. DENNIS SMITH and its secretary the

*Cont'd on P. 11*

## A POWERFUL ENCOUNTER

*SISTREN* asked a number of well-known women who attended Forum '85 for their views on the Encounter, in order to get an in-sight hitherto not given by the media. Some of their comments are set out below.

My first week was total confusion, frustration and some excitement. I was enrouting on different planes to reach Nairobi. I ended up in Cairo, Egypt, riding a camel! This was because several of us were left there when the computer showed our names as having cancelled! It was fun being there anyhow and a good travelling experience.

For me the Forum was a success. Although there were one or two problems, for me that was the least. The ten to twelve thousand women taking part were strongly united in a common cause, especially in the Peace Tent and the presence of the Caribbean women was felt strongly in all the workshops they organised or attended.

As a *SISTREN* being there was a great learning experience for me. Forum '85 was just the beginning of women fighting for equality, development and peace. At the end of it all, I asked myself, "Where do we go from here?" Some women were chanting for a next Forum in five years time. United we stand, divided we fall, and the struggle continues.

**LANA FINIKIN – STAGE MANAGER AND FOUNDING MEMBER, *SISTREN*.**

I didn't go with any great expectations. From the brochures put out beforehand, I could see there were not going to be any resolutions; the organisation seemed loose and I did not see how we would be able to benefit. I went expecting chaos, fragmentation and nothing concrete to take place. However, I found there was a programme everyday so we could know what was going to be happening and once you could choose carefully from the events offered, it was possible to get something out of it.

I was mainly interested in seeing what strategies women had come up with for getting their specific issues dealt with at a political level. There was an attempt by the right-wing, led by the U.S., to make

a distinction between women's issues and political issues. This was not the feeling of the Forum, which took the opposite view, but there were no channels for recording this fact. I feel it was a deliberate ploy which in fact succeeded in blunting the voice of the majority of women.

Of interest too was seeing how far the debate had come between feminists and socialist women which started in the '75 Forum. That debate is now less antagonistic. The socialist women have become more understanding of feminist issues and being more reassured about the feminist commitment to social change. This was a major gain.

**JOAN FRENCH, RESOURCE PERSON, *SISTREN*.**



*Forum '85 participants – fearless in speaking out on broad issues affecting them.*

THE FIRST THING is that you have to see FORUM '85 for what it was – an encounter. It was not a meeting or conference . . . not geared towards final position papers or resolutions. As an encounter I think it was successful for three main reasons:

(1) The development of awareness among women whereby the connections are being made to concepts of equality, development and peace.

(2) The high level of concern with economic issues. There were a number of calls for a New International Economic Order and concern for taking an approach for development which works for people rather than the abstract goal of 'growth'.

(3) The Peace Tent – a huge tent on campus organised by a group of feminists from all over the world was a new idea and a very great success. It promoted dialogue between the women of the Soviet and US delegations to the point where they're planning to have joint peace days where each promotes activities in their respective countries. Both delegations also brought soil from their countries which they used to plant a symbolic Peace Tree on the Nairobi University campus.

**BEVERLEY ANDERSON-MANLEY**

Forum '85, held in Nairobi Kenya between July 10 and 19, was a powerful and moving experience for me.

I moved among over ten thousand women from all over the world – women who from their dresses and costumes, from their languages, dance, songs gave me a good glimpse into the culture and traditions of their peoples,

Testimonies of the injustice of capitalism and imperialism, of hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, oppression, persecution, racism and apartheid and the violation of the rights of peoples to choose and build their countries in the interest not of the minority oppressor class, but for the majority, poured out in the workshops.

Within all this, we in the Caribbean told our own story of the militarization of the area, of the invasion and occupation by the US of Grenada, with the collusion of the reactionary Seaga regime, and the resulting increase in unemployment from 14% under the revolution to 65% today; of the emergence of drugs and prostitution on the island; we spoke of the IMF policies and their effect on Jamaican women and children in particular. We exposed the layoffs, the high prices and the devaluations of the Seaga IMF government.

In similar vein women hailed the

Cuban revolution and people, and many of us from Jamaica could speak of the selfless sacrifice that Cuban doctors and construction workers had given in our country.

Forum '85 was a victory for women of the world; the ordinary toiling women who could not be there; democratic and progressive women, christians, communists, feminists and socialists . . . decent fair minded women from all over the world who want genuine equality, development and progress for women.

**LINETTE VASSELL — CONVENOR,  
COMMITTEE OF WOMEN FOR  
PROGRESS (CWP).**

Forum '85 was indeed an "Encounter". Thousands of women from differing political, religious, class and racial backgrounds had their encounter in Nairobi, Kenya to participate in Forum '85, each with their own story of oppression, of struggle, of participation, of joy and of laughter.

Participation in the workshop sessions led one to the conclusion that the objectives of the Decade had not been met.

Positively, we were able to discuss the International Economic Crisis, the lack of progress towards a New International Economic Order; the continuing increase of already massive expenditure on armaments; the question of World Peace and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace.

Another area of particular interest was the question of youth. One workshop for youth women addressed the question of the percentage of youth-population in the developing countries (over 50%) and the double discrimination against young women in the society, both as young people and as women.

The Caribbean women were not to be outdone. There were some hilarious moments and serious ones among us. SISTREN THEATRE COLLECTIVE did us proud and was the talk of the Forum.

All in all, Forum '85 was positive. It proved that whether you were fighting for Peace especially those women from the developed world; or for survival like the Western African women; or against apartheid like the South Africans; or for economic survival and sovereignty like the Third World countries, or the right to self-determination like the Latin

American countries — the common enemy is imperialism.

**AUDRY BUDHAI, CHAIRPERSON  
PEOPLES NATIONAL PARTY YOUTH  
ORGANISATION.**

Of significance was the solidarity of the Third World Women in particular. It was an eye-opener for me, how women see themselves elsewhere, which is not that different to how Jamaican women see themselves.

I was very impressed with the way the women stood up for themselves. Women from South Africa and the Phillipines; the Arabs and the Israelis. They were fearless when they spoke out about issues affecting them. They showed us that when you're prepared to stand up on issues you can get changes. We Jamaican women have a lot to learn about women coming together more. We are too divided; there's not enough solidarity.

I found that Caribbean issues were downplayed. There was a definite move to take Caribbean issues out of the Forum... it's a region that is very hot politically. I went to two workshops which purported to be about the Caribbean. One had two Puerto Rican women and blacks who claimed to be from the Caribbean and living in America. This work-

shop was about individual women in the media — nothing on the pressing Caribbean issues like becoming a zone of peace which we all wished to discuss. The only differed in that it was run by Americans who claimed that their forefathers were of Caribbean descent. Neither workshop was well-received by the region's women.

**SHIELA NICHOLSON, DIRECTOR,  
VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION FOR  
THE UPLIFTMENT OF CHILDREN  
(VOUCH).**

The Non-governmental Forum was definitely the most exciting aspect of the Nairobi event. Although enormously ambitious (1,000 workshops in 10 days) and disorganised at times, it pointed to specific areas of need as well as successes over the years. I was particularly impressed by the series on WOMEN, LAW AND DEVELOPMENT, which was a learning experience for me. Also the focus of the NGO Forum was on developing countries which is great for countries like Jamaica. The Governmental conference was more formal — they accomplished what U.N. governmental conferences seek to accomplish. All in all, one can say, "I survived Nairobi".

**DR. HEATHER ROYES, MEDIA  
SPECIALIST.**

## My choice for: "WOMAN OF THE DECADE"

PAULINE CRAWFORD AND JASMINE SMITH of SISTREN'S POPULAR EDUCATION PROGRAMME, asked sisters of the HAYES WOMEN'S CLUB who would be their choice for the title WOMAN OF THE DECADE. Below are some of the answers:

MS. ENA DONALD, unemployed mother: "I would recommend MRS BEVERLEY MANLEY 'cos she do plenty for women. It was her idea to have the Basic School at Jamaica House and she organised a cultural show in Maypen for young women.

MRS. ESMERALDA LEWIS, shop keeper: "I say HONOR FORD-SMITH for how she start SISTREN and still working with it eight years later . . ."

MRS. PATSY REID, housewife: "CARMEN DOWNER, PRESIDENT OF THE CITIZENS ASSOCIATION OF NEWTOWN, HAYES, CLARENDON, because of the input she make to the community. She take a real interest and arrange for the community to get lights and water. Is she make sure the women get their names on the papers when they buying house with their husbands. She all go to town and get the papers and get housing representative to come and talk to us at the Citizens Association meeting. She arrange for some unemployed youths to get waste land for farming and is because of she that we now have our own cemetery, so we don't have to go to Maypen for our burials . . ."

## FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

# "MUFFET INNA ALL A WI"



*Rude-Boy, Lorna Burrell-Haslam (L) about to steal the pot off the fire as Muffet and friend Beverley Elliot (c) and Lana Finikin (L) are distracted by other problems of the day.*

### SISTREN UNDER THE STARS (EXTRACTS)

by Fred Archer

DAILY GLEANER, APRIL 17,  
1985.

Sistren Time Here Again they proclaim in their opening number. And, indeed, here they are, the Sistren Theatre Collective in songs, dance and drama, celebrating their anniversary festival under the the stars at the Zinc Fence open-air theatre. Pleasanter, despite the metal chairs that seem specially designed to torture the customers at Kingston outdoor functions, than being cooped up inside on a fine night.

Sistren songs carry the same sort of messages as Sistren plays. Every Woman Just a Woman, for example, meaning all in the same boat and the same minibus.

Then a sketch and song of three higglers in competition for space and sales, realising that they all face difficulties that unite them.

And perhaps inevitably, the sketch with the maid and the too-demanding mistress.

Sistren on the whole are better actresses than singers, and movements are not too well synchronised, but the songs do have point.

The play presentation, Muffett Inna All A Wi, I saw last year as created collectively by the actresses themselves with Honor Ford-Smith and Hilary Nicholson. In clearly stated sequences it lighted the predicaments of women in society at different periods. The treatment was simplistic and exaggerated in parts and needed some doctoring, but it hung together.

Now Eugene Williams, who like Winston Bell is from the School of Drama, has been brought in to direct. He has discovered a parallel between Muffet of the play and Little Miss Muffet of the nursery rhyme.

If I had not had the benefit of seeing the original I might have



had trouble decoding what it was all about.

The Sistren qualities of down-to-earth realism have been sacrificed, tragic edges blunted and touches of humour thrown away.

I hope Sistren are not beginning to lose their nerve. Their best qualities have been the straightforward realism, the genuine roots quality of productions orginated by themselves, shaped and guided somewhat by sympathetic female professionals such as Honor-Ford-Smith and Hortencer Lindsay.

My advice to them is to stick with the ladies (let no one accuse me of chauvinism after this!) and let the male fantastics plough their furrows elsewhere.



*The trickster/salesman Beverly Hanson, auctions off women's bodies.*

## Letter

Dear Hilary and Sistren all,

We saw the show on Saturday. We were both thrilled and moved. MUFFET is really exciting theatre. Congrats. Such a shame the audiences have been so small. Anyway don't be discouraged. Press on. Peace and Love

Mr. & Mrs. Easton Lee.

# REVIEWING "SWEET SUGAR RAGE"

by ARCHIE LINDO.

Time does fly and it seems difficult to consider that Sistren Theatre Collective is now eight years old. The commencement and development of Sistren through the years is certainly one of Jamaica's finest achievements.

They have travelled overseas with successes in England, Canada, the United States and Holland.

Back here in Jamaica they have carried their performances through rural Jamaica. This is one of their strength — that they get to know the island and the people, and learn about the problems which the women face. So, by this process of factual research their stage productions when they take the boards are authentic and based on facts, which, if you ask me, is a most commendable idea on which to build any theatrical performance.

In their first film "SWEET SUGAR RAGE", which is part documentary they have done just that. Contact was made in the sugar belt in Vere. One particular glaring case of a woman who worked in the cane fields and became ill. She was then offered a job by management to be a Supervisor, but the irony was that the pay she received was not as much as the pay due to a supervisor.

I have seen a preview of "SWEET SUGAR RAGE". I found the open-

ing section a thing of beauty and information. The beauty is in the excellent photography and the information is that, quite honestly, the amount of hard work put into the production of sugar cane, was for me, as it will be for many very informative and adequately shown in the film.



*Mrs. Edna Manley, under whose patronage the premiere was held, was presented with flowers by Sophia, Cerene Stephenson's daughter.*

When I saw the film the sound quality was flawed, but this has been adjusted.

The second half of the film needed tidying up and tightening. I am sure too that this must have been done. Documentaries are not easily accomplished successfully these days.



*Mae Thompson hands over the proceeds from the premiere of Sweet Sugar Rage to Hayes Womens Club.*



*Bev Hanson (at mike), Winston Bell (guitar) and Joy Erskine (congos) entertained with SISTREN SONGS.*



*A section of the crowd that attended the Sweet Sugar Rage premiere, at the U.S. Information Service auditorium.*



*M.C. Elaine Wint-Leslie chats with Mr. Hugh Small, former finance minister during cocktails.*

# ART IN ACTION

by Anna Maria Hendricks

The first 'SISTREN TEXTILES EXHIBITION', part of its 8TH ANNIVERSARY FESTIVAL... was remarkable not only because of the textiles themselves, but because of how they originated and what they



Poet Lorna Goodison opened the exhibition with a special poem for SISTREN (See p. 11)

represent.

The hundreds of SISTREN workshops which have been held on issues critical to women have given women in slums, canefields, factories, schools and prison, as well as in sub-urban areas, the chance, to examine and resolve personal problems and to strive for social improvements. Participants have acted out and made drawings of personal experiences and memories. Skits evolved into plays, and drawings into textile designs.

This is Art functioning as it should: healing, lifting, transforming the human mind and its reflected experience – the world we live in.

Art is not only for the elite; it is a transforming tool for all levels of society. Children, labourers, sophisticates, the handicapped, as well as artists, need a foundation in Art, for it is an essential, irreplaceable part of human development. Each individual works at his or her own level. The mistake has been in thinking that Art is a trimming rather than a need the society, so it has been allowed to dwindle in our primary and secondary schools. If uncorrected, not only the quality of our Art, but of our people, will be affected.

Fortunately, the discovery and use of the arts of theatre and print-making by these 12 dynamic women, with assistance from their two directors and other Friends, indicate a people beginning to take up the right tools for self transformation.

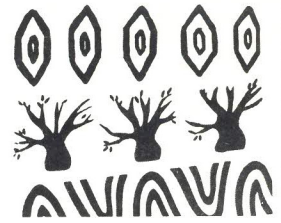


The 'bird' proved to be very popular with the buyers.



Some of the SISTREN youth who modelled the SISTREN fashions, to the delight of the audience.

## TEXTILES



SISTREN's wall hangings deal with two themes, their theatrical productions and their lives. They reveal and inform with the starkness and clarity of which screen printing is capable. Some were designed by CERENE STEPHENSON, who took a brief course in drawing at the Jamaica School of Art; others are collective creations from workshops, co-ordinated by individual members. The idea for 'Nana Yah' came from JEAN SMALL, tutor at the J.S. D., who was inspired by an African Christmas card, with graphics by MBALA, who has for several years assisted the group with programme designs and advertising.

The exhibition also included a range of printed T-shirts and garments for adults and children, bags, and cushions.

The textiles show technical proficiency, though they would benefit from further improvement in designing and use of colour.

SISTREN's original textile printing has a message for all of us. It is part of Jamaican Art. Call it "Folk Art" or "Intuitive Art" or just "Art" – for that is what it is: Art in action.



THE JAMAICA INFORMATION SERVICE (JIS) covered the event and produced a television feature.

# HAYES CONCERT

The HAYES WOMEN'S CLUB held a highly successful fund-raising concert as part of the SISTREN ANNIVERSARY FESTIVAL. It was the first time the Club held such a function for the entire community, and what a good time was had by all.

The overall emphasis was on comedy, in the form of short skits, songs and dance. Members of the WOMEN'S CLUB performed a folk song medley with movement.

A high point of the concert was an hilarious rendering of TINY WINEY by 15 year old RONALD 'BABY WILL' CAMPBELL, a casual labourer. 'BABY WILL' brought the house down, dressed



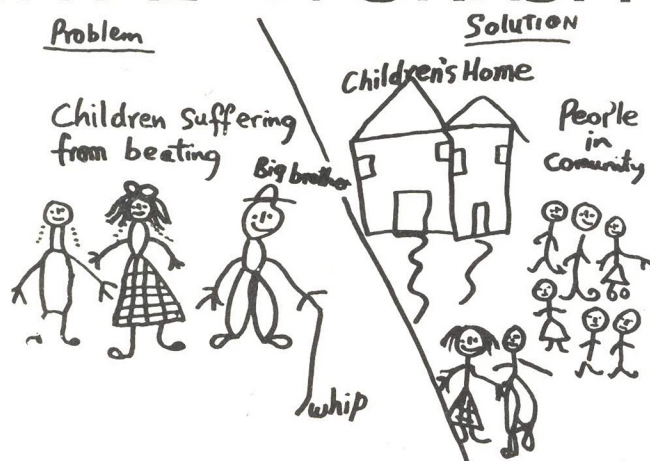
Pauline Crawford of the SISTREN Workshop Team leading rehearsals for the Folk song medley presented by club members.

up as an old woman and doing alot of winding movements.

Also popular with the audience was the SISTREN team comprising BEVERLEY HANSON, LANA FINIKIN, LILIAN FOSTER, JASMINE SMITH and BEVERLEY 'DIDI' ELLIOT who performed

songs from the SISTREN SONG PACKAGE. The concert ended with wild "Winey Wineyng" from DIDI and BABY WILL to a kumina rythmn beat out on the congas by JOY ERSKINE, after the enthusiastic audience shouted for more.

# FESTIVAL WORKSHOPS



Working out problems in drawings – one form used in the SISTREN work-

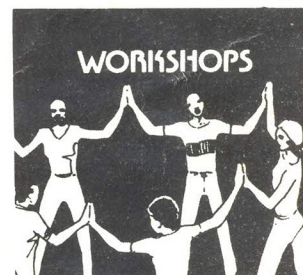
shop process.

Representatives from nine organisations took part in a series of SISTREN FESTIVAL WORKSHOPS, aimed at teaching women involved in community organisation how to use drama as a tool for communication and problem-solving.

The workshops were staged over three consecutive Saturdays in May and June at the JAMAICA SCHOOL OF DRAMA. Participants came from the MEL

NATHAN INSTITUTE, FROME CULTURAL GROUP, PROJECTS FOR PEOPLE (PFP), HAYES WOMENS CLUB, RIVERTON WOMENS CLUB, COMMITTEE OF WOMEN FOR PROGRESS (CWP), THEATRE GROUP FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION (TGNL), THE WOMENS CONSTRUCTION COLLECTIVE and NGUZO SABA.

PAULINE CRAWFORD of SISTREN's POPULAR EDUCA-



TION PROGRAMME WORKSHOP TEAM, led the participants in the methods and techniques used by the COLLECTIVE in the workshop process, including warm-up games, exercises, movement and folk songs.

During the discussion and evaluation session, sisters taking part expressed the view that they would be far more confident in leading workshops in their respective communities and commented on how well the workshop process brought them together.

"We felt a real sense of togetherness. Although we were strangers at first, the forms SISTREN introduced us to – the songs, games and excercises, brought us all together. . ." said one participant.

# CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATION OF FEMINIST LAUNCHED

Some forty women from ten Caribbean countries came together in Barbados on April 1, for the launching of the CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATION FOR FEMINIST RESEARCH AND ACTION (CAFRA).

CAFRA arose out of a 1980 meeting in Puerto Rico at the IDS/CEREP seminar on WOMEN IN SOCIAL PRODUCTION. The original Co-ordinating team comprised SISTREN Artistic Director, HONOR FORD-SMITH and Resource person JOAN FRENCH as well as SONIA CUALES, CYNTHIA ELLIS-HIGINIO, and RHODA REDDOCK.

The aim of CAFRA is to adopt an approach to women's problems from the perspectives of race, class and sex, and to promote the inter-relationship between research and action.

## RESEARCH AREAS IDENTIFIED

The meeting finalised fourteen priority areas for research by CAFRA. These include the Caribbean Basin Initiative; Peace, population Control Policies; sexual violence, women and trade, social and economic conditions of women; voting patterns of women and Caribbean family forms. Research is also planned into compiling a directory of feminists and female professionals in the region. A history of women's labour and struggle, womens cultural expressions as a means of building power; an examination of existing feminist theory, education and gender relations and women in Caribbean literature are other topics slated for priority research.

The meeting appointed RAW-WIDA BAKSH-SOODEEN as CAFRA's first Co-ordinator. RAW-WIDA hails from Trinidad and Tobago and is a member of the organisation WOMEN WORKING FOR SOCIAL PROGRESS (WWSP).

## FACING UP TO THE LABEL 'FEMINIST'

The meeting defined 'feminists' as "those who recognise the exploitation and oppression in the society, AND work actively to change the situation." Interestingly, the meeting pointed to "the tremendous struggle of consciousness... to begin identifying oneself as feminist", but felt strongly there was a definite need to use that word as a label.

Since its launching, members of the 3-months old organisation have been putting their energy into seeking funds and widening membership. The Secretariat has established a regular meeting schedule in Trinidad, and has recommended that national representatives seek to set up similar channels between members in their countries as a means of strengthening each local feminist movement.

## CAFRA MEMBERSHIP

Women can join CAFRA at two levels; either through the local co-ordinator SCARLETTE GILLINGS (UNDP) or through the local organisation, the COMMITTEE OF WOMEN FOR PROGRESS. Membership is open to those in agreement with CAFRA'S stated aims and objectives. The annual fee is US\$6.00 ■

## LOCAL BRIEFS

### VISITING CANADIAN



Cathy Cayuga — Canadian Indian puppeteer.

SISTREN welcomed Cathy Cayuga into the group during the month of May. 26 year old CATHY, an Indian of the MOHAWK-ONONDAGA nation, hails from HAMILTON, ONTARIO. While with us CATHY gained experience of our POPULAR EDUCATION WORKSHOPS and worked in the Community Drama Classes at the JAMAICA SCHOOL OF DRAMA. She also gave a very successful children's workshop on puppet-making and introduced SISTREN TEXTILES to beading work, as well as generally informing us about her work in Canada among native Indians.

Writing from HAMILTON, ONTARIO on her return home, CATHY said in part, "People are so interested in the SISTREN THEATRE COLLECTIVE that I've started giving informal sessions about your group. I think that the women I speak to realise that they also can make an impact (on) the issues that concern them here in Canada. SISTREN and the things that you do is an inspiration!"

## THANKSGIVING LUNCHEON May 16, 1985;

BEVERLEY HANSON and DELORES ROBINSON represented SISTREN at the YWCA's annual thanksgiving luncheon in celebration of Ascension Day.

# Theatre of the Americas: SISTREN HIGHLY REGARDED

The first FESTIVAL OF THEATRE OF THE AMERICAS, Montreal, Canada, May 24-June 4, left SISTREN participants with no doubt about the high regard international theatre circles have for the SISTREN THEATRE COLLECTIVE.

"The experience made me realise the strong tradition SISTREN has developed over the last seven years," said Artistic Director, HONOR FORD-SMITH. "People have taken notice. SISTREN is highly regarded in theatre circles. . . and well established."

LORNA BURRELL-HASLAM also noted the level to which participants – particularly from the developed countries—were impressed by SISTREN'S experimental work. "(They) felt SISTREN had developed a very high standard, and talked a lot about the differences in their own productions which are done from scripts, and ours which are created through improvisation. The improvisation allows us to draw on real life experiences and ensure the past is not forgotten," she said.

The Festival, which organisers say will be held every two years, drew theatrical groups and personalities from CUBA, VENEZUELA, CANADA, the U.S.A., ARGENTINA, BRAZIL and MEXICO as well as JAMAICA.

Participants watched a variety of plays and took part in evaluation sessions as well as a series of workshops. Other aspects of the Festival included an international symposium on theatre criticism, an exhibition on the latest developments in sceneography and films on theatre and other cultural forms in the various participating countries.

Honor was at the opening of the Festival to present a paper to a

four-day conference of women involved in theatre. The paper was entitled "WOMEN TRANSFORM THEATRE" and centred on the work of SISTREN in Jamaica. "I learned from the conference just how privileged SISTREN is. Although we don't work in privileged conditions by any means, the fact is that other women involved in theatre are extremely insecure even

FESTIVAL DE THEATRE DES AMERIQUES '85



in the advanced countries. They have no companies for female theatre workers or long-term working relationships amongst themselves, . . . muchless guaranteed audiences. . ."

Honor described the conference within the Festival as a "useful experience."

On the plus side, it was the first time women theatre workers in the region were coming together to exchange experiences and identify the real problems they are facing. It was generally felt that womens theatre was not developing to the extent of its potential. In this con-

text, questions were raised as to how standards for judging feminist theatre could be set given the fact that women have not for long been in the 'powerful' positions such as director, writer or producer. How should the art of women in theatre be measured given the lack of experience in this area? Should the role of the critic be redefined to ensure more involvement?

Honor found the discussions 'stimulating' but she also noted a low-key representation of the black woman theatre worker. "The black feminist theatre in America was not represented at the conference. In fact I was the only black there apart from one chicano. . ."

JAMAICAN THEATRE MORE SERIOUS.

LORNA spent much of the Festival viewing plays and attending evaluation sessions afterwards. Her view was that theatre in Canada was far different to theatre in Jamaica. "They don't deal so much with the realities of the present society . . . more the classics, like Shakespeare. Our theatre is more serious."

"The only exception amongst the Canadian plays were those from Newfoundland, which looked at present day realities in the form of participatory theatre. The plays from the Third World countries, like Cuba, were more like our theatre. . . also dealing with present day society."

"Going on such a trip – meeting different people, hearing different languages, getting about in a big city – was good experience for me," Lorna said. "Language was a problem (and) I would recommend that SISTREN members start learning other languages, especially Spanish so that when we go on trips like these, we can get more out of it. . . accomplish certain goals." ■

Cont'd from P. 2

REV. MRS. MARJORIE LEWIS-COOPER

They join over 40,000 delegates from some 145 countries in celebration of the youth of the world, in this the United Nations Year of the Youth. All delegates are sponsored by the Soviet Government.

FORT-DE-FRANCE, MARTINIQUE

The COLLECTIVE has also been in Fort-de-France, Martinique where the group has given its first performances in the French-speaking Caribbean. SISTREN performed 'MUFFET INNA ALL A WI' and 'SISTREN SONG' from July 22-27 in Martinique's Annual Cultural Festival. The Festival, which actually got underway July 5, is organised each year by SERMAC, Martinique's Municipal Services for Arts and Culture, which invited SISTREN to take part. The theme of the Festival for 1985 was "IDENTITY AND CULTURE".



Interviewed for Martinique TV: Hilary Nicholson (c) translates for Loma Burrell -Haslam in rude boy costume at right and Joy Erskine (L)

NAIROBI, KENYA

Stage Manager, LANA FINIKIN and Resource Person, JOAN FRENCH represented the COLLECTIVE at the United Nations World Conference of Women in Nairobi Kenya. LANA was funded by the Non-Governmental Organization Forum '85 Planning Committee, based at the United Nations in New York, and JOAN was sponsored by the Women and Development Unit (WAND) of the University of the West Indies Cave Hill campus in Barbados.

LANA and JOAN took part in several activities at the conference including a panel discussion and various workshops. They also presented a workshop skit developed by the group which centres on the problems affecting women in the Third World as a result of IMF agreements signed by their governments.

Poetry

*A praise song sistren  
For rising above  
beginnings  
For showing how  
woman can  
work and live up  
and so  
the next time  
you hear some woman say  
'me no have no woman  
friend'  
You can say  
'Sistren'  
Every big woman  
have big woman friend  
A praise song to sistren then  
for holding up the mirro,  
lest we don't remember how  
young girl can turn  
belly woman, fallen woman  
and almhouse woman  
But still rise  
evolving into  
We are the despair of our  
enemies - woman.  
We pass through fire and cherish*

*water - woman  
we are acquainted with every  
all manner of pain - woman  
and we still don't hate man  
and we touch light  
and we hand strong .  
For ten years being - a praise song  
For holding on - a praise song  
For taking our big woman song  
that some feel should  
be a hungry belly no hope one  
a despair and a dirge  
over 400 years long. . . .  
For taking it and raising it  
like a banner  
that we hand weave and  
stitch  
for flying it bright in their face  
say Downpressor, watch this!  
  
For the hope of righteous  
heartease at dawn. . .  
What else to give you sistren  
no must a praise song?*

Lorna Goodison, May 1985.

*Cont'd from P. 1* **U.N. DECADE OF WOMEN ENDS:  
BUT THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES**

these were identified as root causes of the hardship and deprivation suffered by the majority of the Caribbean people. Sisters pointed to the widespread unemployment, the reduction in social services such as education and health; the rising prices which place basic necessities out of the reach of the majority of families. It was agreed that women and children are the hardest hit by these conditions, in a region where upwards of one-third of all households are maintained by women. Delegates evoked the special plight of rural women who form the majority in the Caribbean as in all the world.

Grave concern was expressed over the growing threat to peace in the region. Speakers pointed to the massive militarization of the Caribbean being carried out by US imperialism, and condemned the invasion and occupation of Grenada. Workshop participants learned that there are more American troops, warships, war-planes, arms and

ammunition in the Caribbean than ever before. The women expressed concern that their homeland was being converted into a military base from which the US could attack Cuba and Nicaragua and undermine the liberation movements in Latin America and as far as Africa.

Caribbean Women in Nairobi established rich links of solidarity with women in national liberation movements in many parts of the world. Women from other countries came to the Caribbean workshops out of a desire to learn about the region and to build links of sisterhood and people to people solidarity.

Sisters from the Caribbean extended warm solidarity in particular to the people of Southern Africa in their struggle against Apartheid and the criminal Pretoria regime; the people of Cuba and Nicaragua who are threatened by military aggression from US imperialism; to the people of Palestine in their flight against Zionism.

Caribbean delegates resolved to build closer links among the Womens' organizations of their own region and to work for the strengthening of their common struggle.

Delegates present at the Chirimo meeting also ratified the declaration of the delegates from Latin America and the Caribbean, "our struggle continues" as a basis for action to carry forward the themes of the UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development, Peace.

It was evident from all discussions that the consciousness of Caribbean women had increased over the Decade; that many new women's organizations had developed during these years; and that there is a greater militancy among Caribbean women, a determination to struggle for change which will bring better conditions, not only for themselves as women, but for all of their peoples; for the Caribbean to be declared a zone of peace; for the sovereignty of Caribbean peoples, for the New International Economic Order, for a new social order and a better world. ■

*Cont'd from P. 1* **SISTA ANSA A CHAT 'BOUT DE DECADE**

woman dem a plan fi gi all di wuk dat de place dem weh shut dung used to do! Yes; for dem believe seh we born to be housewife and housewife suppose fi tek care a man, pickney, old people and sick people fi notten, PLUS no mek no murmer."

"Well my Granny seh dat fi her granny generation neva even know what name housewife. She tell me seh dem did a wuk side by side wid man and dat is only di odder day dem start lick it inna we head seh woman only suppose fi do certain kind a wuk; dat woman suppose fi depend pon man fi put bread in dem mout' and dat we nuh suppose to get the same pay like man."

"She seh she tink seh dem bring in dis housewife business now so dat dem can mek dem profit gawn clear! Di housewife argument mek dem haffi member how much woman really outa work, and when

dem waan fi fling out' more a wi, it easy, since ascorden to dem, we no suppose fi wuk anyway."

"She seh she cyaan find no odder else explanation fi why dem a pay di sista dem in de Free Trade Zone one a de lowest wages in de world or why dem only a train de woman trainee inna HEART fi sew and bun head."

"Granny tell me seh dis a no de fus time dat dem waan woman fi keep di country going when it inna crisis. Is long time now woman a grow food and carry go a market fi feed we when hard time ah beat wi and dem export economy only a benefit few. She seh dis yah is a very old strategy dress up inna fancy dress costume fi fool we up. She sey if fi her generation and fi her granny generation did get half the opportunity whe dem big business man ah get nowadays den you'd a see one different Jamaica today".

Granny seh we no fi siddung and tek

di extra wuk weh dem a dump pon we and de high price weh dem a bun we wid. If wha' di sista dem dat go a Nairobi talk, 'bout "Greater Consciousness" is true, den whole heapa information suppose fi deh fi help we plan we strategy fi overcome dem problem yah."

"Plenty a wi neva did even know seh 1976-1985 was dedicated to the advancement of woman. All wi know is dat wi neva did get no advancement but same like how we usual ready fi organise weself fi trow wi likkle pardner and ting, wi ready fi organise weself fi better we material condition".

"But we nuh jus' waan jump and do a ting. We do dat before and it neva work. Somebody else always tek over and a nah we get di gain. We waan di information weh me hear seh dem collect in de last 10 years fi put pon toppa we experience fi build we movement. For woman ready fi move; we ready fi lead weself, and we waan well covered on all fronts so we in a better position fi win. ."