

WOMAN

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Struggle

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(This issue is dedicated to International Women's Day (IWD), which is celebrated throughout the world on March 8.)

GUYANA

In a statement issued on International Women's Day nine women's organizations in Guyana called to the attention of their regional counterparts the political, social and economic crisis facing Guyanese.

"In many parts of the Third World, and right here in the Caribbean," the statement said, "women's groups and organizations are no doubt agitating on such issues as equal opportunity and improved working conditions. In Guyana, however, for all but a handful of women the main issue is one of survival."

The statement cited the shortage of essential foods and drugs; the poor condition of hospitals and health centres; a deteriorating education system; and a steep rise in violent crime as being central to the issue of survival.

The organizations issuing the statement urged women's groups in the Caribbean and beyond to "support our efforts to bring sustenance and hope to our people."

Making the appeal were: Clerical & Commercial Workers Union Women's Section; Guyana Presbyterian Demerara County Women's Organisation; Presbyterian Women National Organisation; Ladies of Charity; Ursuline Sisters; Ruby Jamaat Ladies Association; Working People's Alliance Women's Section; Women's Progressive Organisation; and Women Against Terror.

The Women's Revolutionary Socialist Movement (WRSM), women's arm of the ruling People's National Congress in Guyana, sponsored a series of activities around International Women's Day, including two symposia on the theme "Resourceful Woman for Effective Living in the People's Co-operative."

The symposia which were held in six regions of the country on March 4 and 11, discussed such areas as agriculture, health, fuel and energy, education, housing, and clothing.

On March 8, a concert was held at "Cerenade", the monument erected by the WRSM in tribute to Guyanese women.

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Speakers from the WRSM and other women's organizations also visited secondary schools throughout the country to discuss with senior students the significance of IWD and the progress which has been made towards the full integration of women in national development.

The National Chair of the WRSM, Cde. Viola Burnham, participated in a radio programme devoted to IWD and later broadcast a message to the nation to mark the day.

ENGLAND

In Birmingham, England, 25 women protested outside Hiatts, a factory which specializes in the manufacture of torture equipment.

For 200 years the factory has been exporting gang-chains, leg-irons, handcuffs, and bridles to South Africa, other African states, and the Middle East for use in prisons.

The women, representing the Birmingham Women Oppose the Nuclear Threat Group, said they took the action on International Women's Day to express their solidarity with and support for women all over the world who are tortured because they are involved in liberation struggles; or because of their colour, religion, or sexual preference; or because they are poor or uneducated.

Meanwhile, in London, women demonstrated outside the Department of Health and Social Security in support of the Campaign to keep the South London Hospital for Women open.

Five women entered the building and occupied the office of the Minister of Health, for over two hours. They refused to leave until they had spoken with the Minister, who was unavailable. They were eventually removed by the police for "trespassing on private property" but no arrests were made.

The hospital is the last in England run by and for women. Both the local community and the hospital workers oppose the intended closure, but this has been ignored by the Ministry of Health.

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BELIZE

A National Women's Convention took place in Belize City on International Women's Day, as part of a National Women's Week held from March 4 - 8 by the Belize Women's Bureau.

Other events included church services, radio discussions on women's issues, a women in development programme for outstanding Belizean women, and cultural activities.

In addition, an exhibition and sale of women's work at district level was sponsored by the Bureau's District Development Committees and the Home Economics Unit.

THAILAND

To coincide with International Women's Day, prostitutes in Bangkok, Thailand, formed a self-help group called the "Thailand Night Girls' Protection Group."

The group will offer counselling and vocational training for women who have become "too old" for work as nightclub hostesses or bar girls - jobs usually involving prostitution. It will also promote prostitutes' civil rights, lobby government, and try to change anti-prostitute-women attitudes.

Official estimates of the number of prostitutes in Thailand vary from 400,000 to 700,000 out of a population of 50 million, and prostitution forms an integral part of the Thai economy.

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BARBADOS

In Barbados, International Women's Day was celebrated through a variety of activities by different organizations.

The National Organisation of Women chose this day to present awards to two outstanding women; the government initiated the National Advisory Committee on Women's Affairs; and the Embassy of the People's Republic of China held a film festival on women's work in China.

On this day also, the Women and Development Unit (WAND) of the UWI participated in a teleconference linking representatives of the proposed women's studies group on the UWI campus in Barbados with similar groups on the campuses in Trinidad and Jamaica.

WAND also took part in a radio programme and held open house at its Pinelands office.

MIDDLE EAST

Despite a roadblock by Israeli authorities, barring women only from entering Jerusalem, Palestinian women celebrated International Women's Day throughout the West Bank.

Festivals and bazaars were held by the four Women's Committees set up in the West Bank and Gaza, with main events held in Jerusalem and Bethlehem areas. Celebrations included speeches on women's changing role, the general political situation, and reports on the year's successes.

A Women's Day meeting was held at the Palestinian-owned Jerusalem Electricity Company, one of the few institutions which grant women a paid holiday on March 8.

In Nazareth women demonstrators called for equal rights, and in Tel Aviv 500 Palestinian and Israeli women marched denouncing the Israeli occupation and policies in the Occupied Territories and in Lebanon.

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In Russia, the festivities around March 8 began formally the previous day with a gala at the Bolshoi Theatre attended by Soviet Premier Chernenko. It featured speeches on women's equality, and a ballet.

IWD also featured prominently in the press: "Happy holiday, glorious daughters of the motherland," declared Pravda, the official newspaper.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CARICOM SECRETARIAT

CARICOM Secretary-General, Roderick Rainford, is confident that Caribbean women will rise to the challenge now facing them, of a rapidly declining economy which threatens their participation in the development process.

In a message to mark International Women's Day, the Secretary-General called for action at both the national and regional levels to meet the challenge.

He noted that the Secretariat intended to continue work on the Regional Food and Nutrition Strategy; on industrial development - including women's role in industrial development and industrial planning; on preparing women for more effective leadership through training in diplomatic representation; and through the CARICOM Women's Desk to identify and promote women's interests.

At the national level, Mr. Rainford pointed out, there was active planning for continuing programmes of research, data collection, production of resource materials, training workshops, and dissemination of information - all aimed at promoting a deeper understanding among men and women of the various issues and concerns of women.

"It is our hope," he said, "that International Women's Day 1984 will serve as a catalyst for continued well-conceived and well-directed programmes throughout the Commonwealth Caribbean; through building upon the achievements of the past and taking advantage of the heightened awareness of recent times, the region will be well on the way towards deriving the maximum benefit from the full involvement and contribution of its women in all spheres of national life."
