

Equality for Women - 1993

39th Assembly, December 1993

Let not our father's name be lost to his clan because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!
(Numbers 27:4)

Issue

The inequality of women worldwide.

Background

The need to establish equality for women around the world at all stages of their lives requires our attention. Although women's legal rights have been extended by national legislation and by United Nations conventions, parity with men is still not a reality. Barriers to achievement at the highest levels of business, government, and politics still exist. Moreover, no compensatory value is assessed to those contributions made by women who are homemakers, child-rearers or community service volunteers.

In 1992 four women were elected to the U.S. Senate and nineteen to the House, but women still comprise only 10% of the Congress. They are handicapped by campaign finance practice which directs funds to incumbents. In 1993, women were named to the Cabinet, the federal judiciary and the Supreme Court and were accorded the right to serve in combat positions in the military. In Canada, two of the main political parties are led by women. Nonetheless, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women detailed, in its recent "Shocking Pink Paper," a wide range of issues about which women should question candidates.

In the corporate world, a "glass ceiling" inhibits women's entry into executive offices and board rooms. Testimony before the House "Glass Ceiling" Commission pointed out that less than 1/2 of 1% of the highest paid officers or directors of the top 800 public corporations in 1990 were women and only 2.6% of Fortune 500 corporate officers in 1991 were women (Small Business Committee, Hearings, 1993). By the year 2000, it is anticipated that only 15% of new workers in the labor force will be white males, compared to 47% in 1987 (The National Voter, June/July 1993). Thus women must be looked upon to meet the needs of a competitive global marketplace at all levels of employment.

Recent studies indicate that girls are given less attention in the classroom, especially in math and science classes, than boys. Even if inadvertent, the message is powerful. This lack of emphasis on math education has deleterious effects on adult women, who are also frequently undereducated about money matters. Colleges continue to allocate less money for recruitment of female athletes and to scholarships for their intercollegiate athletic program, although such discrimination has been prohibited in the United States since 1972.

Globally, women's rights are violated each day. As Geraldine Ferraro stated in June 1993 at the World Conference on Human Rights:

Beings who are denied full humanity cannot partake fully in government, business, and development. When little
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girls get less food, less medical care, less education, and more work than little boys; when women cannot travel, marry or leave home without some man's permission; when rights to vote, meet and speak out are circumscribed; when children and property belong only legally to men; when women are denied the right to control their bodies, how can women be fully human?

It has been fourteen years since the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Yet these abuses persist worldwide. The United States has not yet ratified CEDAW; Canada did so in 1981.

The Women of Reform Judaism has been a strong and persuasive voice for full equality for women in religious and secular life. We supported the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution and ratification of CEDAW. We have pressed for reform of the Social Security System and other pension plans, comprehensive child care services, equity in health care and legislation to combat crimes against women.

Resolution

The Women of Reform Judaism reaffirms its commitment to equal rights and equal opportunity for women in every stage of their lives and calls upon all affiliates to:

- 1) Monitor community schools to assure equal education and equality of treatment for women in the educational process, beginning with classroom recognition at the earliest stage.
- 2) Encourage the business community to recognize barriers, including a glass ceiling, which prevent women from gaining access to the highest levels of the corporate world; and work towards their elimination.
- 3) Educate constituencies on various aspects of economic literacy, including ramifications of national economic policy and budget proposals and personal, family and business investments; and urge educational institutions at all levels to provide opportunities for women to enhance economic literacy.
- 4) Work within congregations to assure equal opportunity at all staff levels and to assure equality of education by sensitizing religious school teachers to inadvertent differences of expectation.
- 5) Educate members to seek out companies that offer equal opportunities for women for purposes of investment.
- 6) Encourage women to seek public office at all levels of government and to be supportive of women seeking office.
- 7) Urge nations that have established market values for other forms of labor to extend these values to homemakers, child-rearers and community service volunteers in order to establish wage-based governmental benefits for them.
- 8) Seek a higher level of United Nations commitment to women's equality as a human right, call upon all nations to give equal opportunity to female children and urge all nations that have ratified CEDAW to assure that practices comply with provisions of the treaty.

Further the Women of Reform Judaism urges all US affiliates to:

- 1) Call for prompt ratification of CEDAW.
- 2) Support a federal legislative agenda that mandates gender equity in education and economic equity and opportunity for women in all aspects of business and commerce.
- 3) Advocate federal campaign finance reform to assure adequate funding for candidates who challenge incumbents.

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