

U.N. WATCH

CRIA is an accredited non-governmental organization (NGO) of the United Nations and as such is invited to participate in all NGO activities. The concept of the NGO is an interesting one. During completion of the U.N. Charter at San Francisco in 1945, a few delegates requested the creation of a channel for non-governmental views. In addition to its openness, it was thought that this would provide a means of gathering wide support for U.N. principles.

How effective the NGOs really are is a matter of dispute. Many U.N. officials privately decry the entire idea as nonsense and a waste of time. Others actively seek support for their projects among the NGOs. One measure of the United Nations' official attitude is the deliberate exclusion of NGO representatives from crucial meetings.

Pressure from the NGOs only sometimes has a slight effect, as in the U.N. Human Rights Commission. Still, in a bureaucracy as stultifying as the United Nations, the presence of an outside group is healthy, and the NGO movement deserves support.

One-Half the Population

The U.N. Decade for Women is half over and most observers agree women have actually lost ground in the poorer countries, particularly in respect to employment and education. A World Conference of the U.N. Decade for Women will be held in Copenhagen this month to determine a future course of action. To the dismay of Western representatives, the Preparatory Committee that met recently to plan for Copenhagen concentrated on apartheid and Palestinian women.

U.N. conferences on the condition of women have a disturbing tendency to begin with a whoop and end in a wheeze. Everybody agrees on the need for improvement, but where to start? What, besides her sex, does an American career woman denied access to the executive suite have in common with the African or Asian housewife with no education, legal rights, or even the hope of employment?

With limited resources and little support from the male world, where should efforts be concentrated—at the highest level or the lowest? Unless the Copenhagen meeting differs from earlier ones, the chief result will be more documents to add to the file.

Protecting the Environment

The U.N. Environment Program is directed from Nairobi, Kenya, where the view of the world differs from that of London, Paris, or New York. The range of activities is astounding, since everything from noise to tourism affects the environment. Recent issues of the monthly publication *Uniterra* contained articles on the best use of rain water, the plan of seventeen Mediterranean countries to clean up Mare Nostrum, Polish plans to prevent water pollution, the Soviet Union's efforts to halt industrial pollution, a sanctuary for sick birds,

radioactive wastes, and a project in India called *Antyodaya* ("uplifting the last man"), an effort to raise the living standards of four million people whose incomes are below the absolute poverty line, which is set at a per capita income of less than \$50 a year.

The environmental program got its start at Stockholm in 1972. Frightened by the depredations caused by uncontrolled industrial development and unparalleled population growth, the assembled scientists and politicians proposed an ambitious program to collect worldwide data on the environment and then try to limit all types of pollution. In 1982, again in Stockholm, a decade of effort will be evaluated.

Whose Free Press?

The world communications system, dominated by the West through AP, UPI, Reuters, Agence France-Presse, and the major news magazines, has been under scrutiny by UNESCO for several years. Prodded by a bloc of developing nations, various committees (including one led by Sean MacBride) concluded that an imbalance does indeed exist in the presentation of international news. Third World nations complained chiefly of distorted news reports of conditions in underdeveloped countries, emphasizing poverty, corruption, and human rights violations without giving proper attention to the basis of problems and the advances made. The suggestion of a "new world communications order" came first from the Soviet Union and later gained support from the Third World.

The U.S. has been guarded in response to this proposal. A government-controlled press seems considerably less than trustworthy. What, for example, would have come out of Uganda if Idi Amin had controlled the news? Nevertheless, the issue comes up for adoption at the UNESCO general conference in September. In these meetings the nonaligned nations have seventy-seven votes, enough to swing any decision. Ironically, the U.S. will be expected to provide most of the funding.

Back in the ILO

In November, 1977, the U.S. withdrew from the International Labor Organization, having earlier submitted a notice of disaffiliation unless the ILO behaved itself. Henry Kissinger, in 1975, with the approval of the AFL-CIO, warned the labor organization that it was using a double standard by condemning labor practices in industrialized Western nations and ignoring blatant violations in Communist nations. Withdrawal by the U.S. meant the loss of more than a quarter of the ILO budget. At the June, 1979, conference a chastened ILO seemed less politicized and the U.S. rejoined in February, 1980.

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Mr. Fenichell is the CRIA representative to the United Nations and will be reporting his impressions, discoveries, interpretations—favorable and otherwise—in the months to come.
