

---

# 1902-1992, Ninety years of struggle for gender equality

---

by Alice Yotopoulos - Marangopoulos\*

Our Congress this year marks the 90th anniversary of the decision taken in Washington for the establishment of IAW. I therefore consider it my duty to say a few words on the founding and history of IAW.

The International Alliance of Women is the only exclusively feminist international organisation; it has Consultative Status (Category I) with U.N. and the U.N. Specialised Agencies (UNESCO, FAO, UNCTAD, UNIDO, UNICEF, WHO, etc.); the IAW also has Consultative Status with the Council of Europe.

The initiative for its founding was taken by three famous American feminists of the beginning of our century, and specifically by Susan B. Anthony, Elisabeth Stanton and Carrie Chapman Catt, who, on the occasion of the Conference of the "National American Woman Suffrage Association", organised a broader Conference with delegates of women's organisations from ten countries, with the aim of joining their forces. The decision for its establishment was taken at this very Conference in February 1902. It was this Conference that also prepared and approved the Declaration of Principles, which was adopted in 1904 during the first Congress in Berlin, as well as the Charter of the new International Organisation under the title International Woman Suffrage Alliance.

This title was chosen because at that time, the main (though not the only) demand was the acquisition of the right to vote (suffrage), hence the term "suffragettes" or "suffragists" by which the feminists of the first decades of the century were known. This title has been changed later on to a broader one, i.e. International Alliance of Women, a title which our organisation bears to this date.

Affiliate members also increased. All women organisations of various countries who made history in the feminist movement became members of IAW. Among them, to mention only a few, the Swedish Frederika Bremer and the other Nordic organisations, as well as that of Holland, each of which counts some 100 years of life, the British Women's Social and Political Union established in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst, whose statue stand to-day in the courtyard of the British Parliament. The statues of the American founders of IAW are also to be seen to-day in the Capitol in Washington.

Of this world-wide organisation, full of years but always in the *avant guard*, which to-day counts approximately 90 organisations-members in the 5 continents and continuously acquires new members in countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as of South America —countries where totalitarianism, right or left, is recently terminated— I have the great honour of being the tenth President.

II. Which are the aims we are after and which are the basic principles which inspire us?

I will read a few excerpts from the initial International Declaration of Principles of our Alliance, which were prepared in 1902, but which are still young:

1. Men and women are born equally free and independent members of the human race; equally endowed with intelligence and ability, and equally entitled to the free exercise of their individual rights and liberty.
2. The natural relation of the sexes is that of interdependence and cooperation, and the repression of the right and liberty of one sex inevitably works injury to the other and hence to the whole race.
3. In all lands, those laws, creeds, and customs which have tended to restrict women to a position of dependence; to discourage their education; to impede the development of their natural gifts and to subordinate their individuality, have been based on false theories, and have produced an artificial and unjust relation of the sexes in modern society.
4. Self-government **in the home and the state** is the inalienable right of every normal adult...
5. Governments which impose taxes and laws upon their women citizens without giving them the right of consent or dissent, which is granted to men citizens, exercise a tyranny inconsistent with just government.
6. The ballot is the only legal and permanent means of defending the rights to the "**life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness**", pronounced inalienable by the American Declaration of Independence, and accepted as inalienable by all civilised nations. In any representative form of government, therefore, women should be vested with all political rights and privileges of electors".

There are those who erroneously maintain that in this era the Alliance was solely interested in the acquisition of political rights. This is a mistake! As can be easily deduced from the Declaration I just read to you, the Alliance always took a stand and put up claims aiming at equality in all fields. They were simply considering that the acquisition of political rights, and especially that of the vote, should at that time be the prime target, because it would facilitate the acquisition of all others. And to-day, as we shall see, we have come back to the same belief.

III. The Geneva Congress of 1920, held right after World War I, was a turning point for the evolution of our Alliance. During this Congress decisions were taken that broadened and made more detailed and concrete the principles included in the 1902 Declaration.

In the course of a visit to President Wilson himself, it was requested that the principles of equality —starting from political

rights— be adopted by the League of Nations, that close cooperation of the latter with International Women's Organisations be established, that a Special Intergovernmental organisation be established to promote education, that the special problems of working women be included in the Agenda of the newly established International Labour Office, etc.

All these requests were granted: the close cooperation initiated with the League of Nations continued in a new institutionalised form with the U.N. The U.N. established a special Commission on the Status of Women, and a special intergovernmental organisation on education was established (UNESCO). The International Labour Office (later "International Labour Organisation"), worked out special agreements concerning the working woman, basically aiming at eliminating discrimination against women.

Characteristic of the broad mind and the weight of the Alliance is the fact that the Alliance asked the first President of the International Labour Legislation Commission of the ILO Samuel Gompers, that Germany be invited to join the first meeting of this new organisation. When Mme de Witt Schlumberger, one of the French delegates, who wore several medals for war service, pleaded that Germany should be invited to attend the first meeting of the International Labour Organisation, Gompers said "You, a French woman, ask this?" She replied firmly, "Disease and labour problems know no frontiers". The request was finally agreed to, and Germany was accepted.

The most important of all is that all the points of the Geneva Congress Programme of the Alliance were adopted, not only by the League of Nations, but also by its successor, U.N.

I will refer briefly to the most important resolutions of the Geneva Congress of 1920, so that you can judge for yourselves how advanced they have been, and indeed to what extent they are the source of inspiration of U.N. and of women's movement line of thinking:

- Equal political rights.
- Equal personal rights: more specifically, protection of the law against slavery such as still existed in some parts of Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa, and the right for a married woman to retain or change her nationality.
- Equal domestic rights, including the right of a woman on marriage to the use and disposal of her own earnings and property, same rights over her children as the father, protection of children born out of wedlock and of unmarried mother.
- **Equal opportunities** on education, general, professional and technical, and **equal opportunities** for training and for entering industries, professions, civil service, and all administrative and judicial functions.
- Women should receive the same pay as men for the same work.
- The right to work of both married and unmarried women, and labour regulations that should tend towards equality of men and women.
- Participation of women in international organs, committees, etc. competent for such social problems as labour matters, education etc.
- The regulation of prostitution in any form should be abolished; sexual exploitation of any human being should be prohibited.
- A high moral standard for men and women should be recognised.
- Education on sexual matters should be extended.

I would also like to refer to another "first" of the same Geneva Congress. On Sunday June 6, 1920, Maud Royden, a British woman, active member of the Alliance, conducted the service in the Cathedral of St. Peter, preaching from the pulpit of Calvin to the IWSA Congress, the first woman to do so in a Christian

Church.

IV. I believe no-one would object to these positions to-day, although at the time they were proposed they were considered by many as a scandal. All major international organisations (U.N., Council of Europe, etc.) not only have adopted these positions, but are fighting to make them respected. I will read some excerpts from the introduction of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women—that Greece has ratified (L. 1342/83)— which constitute the internationally accepted positions on sex equality.

«The States Parties to the present Convention  
«...Recalling that discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries, hampers the growth of the prosperity of society and the family and makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity».

«...Convinced that the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields».

«...Aware that a change in the traditional role of men as well as the role of women in society and in the family is needed to achieve full equality between men and women...».

And the Convention concludes with specific stipulations for the elimination of discrimination.

The source of all international instruments stipulating equality is to be found to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948—which for the first time expressly opposed to all forms of discrimination, with specific reference to the discrimination based on sex—as well as to the basic principles that the Alliance and the women's feminist organisations had declared long before.

Thus, a whole series of international Conventions, as well as national laws inspired by the former, moved towards establishing equality of the sexes during the recent decades.

V. In spite of this considerable progress, it became obvious that the distance between recognising equality in law and achieving equality in fact is not a small one. And this is true not only as regards equality of the sexes, but in general as regards the possibility of all weak social economic groups of people, to enjoy equal fundamental rights.

Thus, the taking of **positive measures** by the State in favour of weak social groups was proved to be necessary, in view of **materialising** equality, creating **equal opportunities** for all to enjoy all their rights.

A beginning was made with workers' rights, which the International Labour Office<sup>1</sup> (established by the Versailles Treaty), stipulated in favour of the working class. These were the first **social rights**. After World War II, the social, economic and political rights are recognised as fundamental human rights.

The U.N. Convention for the protection of social and political Rights, a whole series of international Agreements of ILO, the social Charter of the Council of Europe of 1961, the recent social charter of E.C., and other international specialised texts, as well as many national constitutions and national laws have already established a **new perception on equality**, much more substantial, much more protective of weak social groups. The **second generation of Human Rights** (social insurance, right to work, free education etc.) are considered as **necessary as freedom**, for every human being to be truly able to enjoy human rights and to have the possibility to have his or her particular personality flourish.

(1) To-day it is called International Labour Organisation (ILO).

**Thus, equality in law has changed into equality of opportunities.**

It is on the basis of this perception that the wonderful structure of Labour Law and the special positive measures in favour of workers was created. The same for the abolition of special racial discrimination, international Agreements and national laws stipulated not only the principle of equality, but also special positive measures and special strategies.

VI. It was within this framework that some **new claims were enunciated by women**, for special measures to be taken by the state in order to offset the special forms of discrimination and inequality existing and working against them for many years. **Women to-day are not satisfied with the mere typical recognition of equal rights**, they ask for **positive measures to be taken so as to make this recognition a fact**. And this position has been accepted by the large international organisations.

It is not a case of favouritism for the benefit of women. Favourable regulations, temptingly relieving, (i.e. pension to women after 15 years of work) but tending to **perpetuate the inequality**, the present submissive and second class position of women, emanating from the out-dated principle of the different roles of the sexes, are to be rejected. Positive measures, on the contrary, aiming at equality, at **the change of the traditional roles and positions of men and women**, the participation of women in decision making, are to be accepted. They urge women to undertake new duties, up to now considered male, do not nail them down to traditional "women's roles" and the so-called "women's values". Such measures, in parallel with the inverse change of the role of man, lead to common **human values**. They support women to stand on their own feet, they do not immobilise them in a state of dependence.

Characteristic of the new guiding lines are Art. 3 and 4 of the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, ratified by the greek L. 1342/83, which provide and command that **all appropriate measures** shall be taken to guarantee to women the **exercise and enjoyment** of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as **temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women**.

VII. The new perception on human rights in general, which has inspired the new conception on women's rights, has thus modeled a **modern humanitarianism** which is international (since it is based on international conventions, declarations etc.), **has a new social dimension and renders all human beings without exception, bearers of human rights**.

**This means a new perception of Democracy, of parity democracy**, which is the motto of our Congress. A democracy which considers it a duty to take appropriate measures allowing **all** to enjoy **real equality and real freedom**.

A basic element of this democracy is the de facto equality of the sexes — starting from the de facto equality in decision making centres. Above all, the equal participation of women in **public offices**, which is a prerequisite for all other reforms aiming at gender equality and universal social progress.

The following extract from the decision of 4/3/86 of the Council of Europe Ministers Conference is characteristic:

**"The participation of women in political life is a substantial demand of democracy and a factor in strengthening equality, in promoting development and in structuring peace and social justice"**.

Allow me at this point to note that we thus have come back to the **first basic demand of IAW**, and of the women's movement in general, for equal political rights, now, however, in a more substantial way. Experience has shown that there is a distance between the recognition of a right by law and the **possibility of all to enjoy this right in fact**.

But even this finding —of the distance between equality in theory and in fact— that constitutes the foundation of the se-

cond generation human rights in general, as well as of specific positive measures for the equality of sexes in particular — the I.A.W. with its perspicacity had clearly sensed, when it was explicitly asking in its basic principles of 1920 (points 8 and 9) that **all opportunities be open to both sexes and not merely that equal rights be recognised** for education, professional and technical, and that women have the same opportunity for training and for entering industries, professions, civil service, and all administrative and judicial functions.

Especially worth mentioning is the decision of July 4th-5th, 1989, of the Council of Europe Ministers' Council on the speeding of implementing gender equality, which contains a whole series of **strategies and positive measures** for this purpose.

Also the E.C. has prepared a new 3-year Action Plan on equality and has recommended that similar plans be prepared at the national level by member countries. I take pleasure in informing you that the Greek Council for Equality has prepared such a plan, **the Greek 3-Year Plan**, which it handed over to the Ministry to the Prime Minister in January 1992.

VIII. Concluding this address, please allow me to express certain thoughts that the venue of our Congress brings to mind.

In this very city of Athens, our Athens, where to-day the Congress on equality of the sexes is inaugurated, I can not but recall that ancient mythology had dedicated this city to a woman, Goddess Athena. This dedication was not without cause; it was not done out of superstition, nor was it sanctimonious. Ancient tradition has it that Athena was the winner in the games that took place between her and a man rival, Poseidon. She battled with wisdom and peace (the olive tree that she planted) and was judged superior to him battling with his vigour and his strong war horse. Allow me to make this thought, which is not, I assure you, a chauvinistic one, that on this very spot on earth this extraordinary happened some thousands of years ago: **Woman** to be acknowledged as winner over man, so that the city to be dedicated to her; **wisdom** to be considered superior to body strength and **peace** superior to bravery; and **woman to be the symbol of both wisdom and peace**.

In this very city, the great Plato was proclaiming in his "Politeia", in the 5th century B.C.:

"There is no special duty of those who govern the city becoming to a woman, because she is a woman, or to a man, because he is a man, but all natural qualities are equally allotted to both sexes".

And yet, thousands of years later —and following long periods during which these principles were denied, even in their birth place ancient Greece— we are fighting to make these principles prevail.

We are fighting to have our **new** principles of to-day, which, however, have such **ancient** foundations, triumph throughout the world and here in their birthplace.

Economic, social and material conditions and prejudices caused endless fights in order for the truth to prevail, a truth that the lucid greek spirit had with foresight conceived thousands of years ago.

Let us make a wish, that the return to the right principles we are witnessing to-day in theory and in law, prevail also in fact. That the time finally comes when such principles triumph universally, in a society of peace and justice, where second class human beings do not exist. Where everyone is entitled to expect conditions allowing him or her to develop his or her personality to the utmost. In other words, let us wish that our struggle is successful in achieving a democracy where freedom and true equality are reality, and where men and women fight side by side, and cooperate as equal partners in the good cause for a society that is more free and just.

\* Alice Yotopoulos - Marangopoulos is Professor of Criminology and f. President, Panteion University, President of the International Alliance of Women, President of the Greek League for Women's Rights and President of the Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights.