

report to the **national assembly of women** of the 14th Congress of the **women's international democratic federation**

Caracas, Venezuela, 9-14 April 2007



women of the world –
a vital force against neo-liberal globalisation, state terrorism and imperialist wars – for **equality, economic and social justice, and peace**

venezuela

introduction

ON the first of December 1945, a Congress of Women was held in Paris. Delegates came from 41 countries representing women who were determined to fight:

- for peace and to prevent wars;
- for women's political, social and economic rights;
- for conditions for the happy development of all children and future generations.

Britain was represented in 1945 by women who had been working in the International Women's Day Committee set up during the war in 1942 and from this was born the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF).

The NAW delegation to the 2007 Congress was Barbara Switzer (President), Val Duncan (Secretary), Ute Navidi (EC Member) and June Plymen (member from the North West).

The Congress was arranged to coincide with the 10th anniversary celebrations of the election of Hugo Chavez in 1998 by the WIDF administration and the Venezuela Coordination Committee in which the Venezuelan Women's Movement had a major role. The Congress was the largest international event to be held in Venezuela and indeed was a formidable task. Moving and feeding so many people together with other logistical problems was an enormous undertaking (the red wrist band in the photo ensured access for meals) and one which Venezuela had grasped with determination and enthusiasm. As Chavez himself said "the size of the task had been underestimated" and the General Secretary of the Communist party in Caracas said to our President at a particular moment of confusion "this is Latin America and we must be patient"! Cuba, true to its solidarity commitments, provided great assistance with equipment and interpreters. Safety was of prime importance to Venezuela and there were dozens of volunteers and women reservists on hand to give help and guidance as necessary. Nonetheless the programme and timetable was very much a moveable feast and somewhat frustrating at times.

A few days prior to the Congress affiliates were asked to bring a 'young person' to the congress to participate in the Annual Venezuelan Young People event with Venezuela providing the tickets. NAW immediately contacted Gemma Tumelty, then President of the National Union of Students, who fortunately was able to attend for the first few days. No tickets arrived. The president and Ute Navidi had been asked to attend early to assist with this event. Off we went determined to sort the ticket problem out once there. A great welcome was waiting us and June Plymen (Val was to arrive a few days later) at the airport where other delegates were gathered together to commence what was an eventful journey to Caracas as one of the main access roads in an out of Caracas had collapsed and only a single road was available.

However we were guilty of wishful thinking, Easter weekend everything shut down, no tickets! Determined not to be defeated the President decided that having invited Gemma to participate we would sponsor her. In full confidence that if anyone could sort this out it would be our Secretary Val, a telephone call at 5am Venezuela time was made by our President to Val Duncan to ask her to do whatever was necessary to get Gemma on the 6.30am flight the next morning from Heathrow. She arrived on schedule and in time to join the event, on which she reports later. The NAW were one of only a few who succeeded in this.

Approximately 500 delegates from over 100 countries (16 from Europe) met in Venezuela for the

14th WIDF Congress, held 9-14 April 2007. In addition to the delegates there were a large number of invited participants and women who were helping with the organisation and administration. In all between 1,000 and 1,500 women gathered for the event.

the congress

The slogan and work of the Congress was agreed at an extended Executive meeting in Rome the previous November and was centred on the following themed plenary sessions, but as some of the workshops were held at the same time the number we were able to cover was limited:

1. The (negative) impacts of neo-liberal globalisation on women
2. The impact of state terrorism and imperialist wars on women
3. The trafficking and merchandising of women and children (with special reference to sexual exploitation of migrant, refugee and displaced women)
4. Building international solidarity against political repression and all forms of violence against women
5. Defending indigenous women's rights and for equality
6. Advancing women's equal social rights to: a) work, b) to reproductive and sexual health, education, social security, food and others
7. Changing the negative role of the media in its presentation of women
8. Women in power and political decision-making positions
9. The history and role of the WIDF in defending women's rights, national independence, social justice, democracy and peace
10. The WIDF, feminism and the gender theory



young people's event



LEFT: GEMMA TUMELTY WITH ECUADORIAN DELEGATES, AND ABOVE: SOME OF VENEZUELA'S YOUNG PEOPLE

THE young people's event was opened by Lida Villaroel of the Colombian Women's Movement in Venezuela who spoke of the women who had been displaced from Colombia. She said that she and other women had paid the price of war and suffered because of their defence of human rights and women's freedom. There was a crisis in both human and political terms. Women were passive as their children died. But the feminist revolution has been declared. Women have come back to the political world and collective action. Unlike other Latin American countries, she said, Colombia was a 'slow society'. Women only received the right to vote in 1969. She recounted the recent history of the women's movement, from 1991 where there was an alliance between the feminists and political parties. It was not an easy process. Many women were killed over the right to abortion. Abortion was approved to give the idea that the human rights of women were respected. Today, thousands of women had to emigrate, with their families, for economic reasons. Many come to Venezuela to help with constructing the revolution. But the human rights of women have to be respected, she said, urging the Young Women's Congress to approve the Charter against War, and the right not to give birth to children who should fight in war.

Another young woman spoke about the support given to refugees in Venezuela, the country with the largest number of displaced women in Latin America. She came from Ecuador to tell the conference about her life as a refugee with her children. The Venezuelan immigration system is 'inclusive' and the children are welcomed into the education system. Tomorrow a proposal was to be presented to Chavez, for a new law for women to be free from violence. "Here, we are dismantling capitalism", she said, and working for peace. Venezuela with Cuba is setting the example.

A young woman from the Clara Zetkin Movement presented a proposal on the main causes of displacement of women in the world, and a young student of the National Experimental University, which enrols young people from poor backgrounds, said she had been unaware of the situation of Colombian women and criticised the mass media.

Gemma Tumelty brought greetings from the National Union of Students in the UK and said that their solidarity with students and young people around the world was assured. She went on to describe the campaigns against racism, sexism and for justice for asylum seekers and other displaced young people. She spoke of the general discrimination against women in education and especially called for

greater access to education often denied to young people from lower income families, especially women.

Gemma said that in spite of problems with translation and organisation which made participation quite difficult at times the meetings were vibrant and discussed many important issues facing women across the globe. There was a big focus on Latin America and the majority of the young women there were from Latin America, but she also met women from Canada, USA, Cyprus, Portugal, France and Lebanon. She added that it was fascinating meeting the women from Latin America, the culture is so different but they are so warm and eager to explain about the situations they live in and the political situations across Latin America, and she learnt so much about Venezuela and Chavez and the revolution and is desperate now to do more in the UK to promote the good that is happening there.

She also went to a meeting about the Miami 5 with some of the Cuban women who explained that solidarity action is still very much needed, both with Cuba and with the Miami 5.

On her last day she met up with Augusto Montiel a member of the National Assembly in Venezuela who took me to some of the social projects of the Chavez Government in particular a textile co-operative run by women that is highly successful. He also took me to the National Assembly where already one third of seats are held by women and they are going for half.

She ended by saying that she was extraordinarily grateful to the National Assembly of Women for inviting her to take part in the delegation.

opening ceremony



THE PLATFORM AT THE OPENING CEREMONY, IN THE MIDDLE, LEFT TO RIGHT: ELENA LINAREZ (PRESIDENT OF THE VENEZUELA WOMEN'S MOVEMENT), ISAIAS RODRIGUES (DEPUTY PRESIDENT OF VENEZUELA), MARIA CAMPOS (WIDF PRESIDENT)

D ELEGATES, visitors and workers gathered early for this event with the full expectation of Hugo Chavez's presence. There was no translation until the formalities began later but there was a carnival atmosphere of great excitement and true to form in such international events, we entertained ourselves, with spontaneous singing and dancing (as space permitted!).

Unfortunately, when the guest arrived it was not Hugo Chavez but the Deputy President Isaias Rodriques who welcomed us (we learned later that Chavez had been unwell). Disappointment did not show and the Deputy President was received with much enthusiasm as he welcomed delegates and said how proud Venezuela was to be hosting such an important international event which would be witnessed around the world. He stressed how important this recognition was to Venezuela which

would be a great contribution to its development especially for the increasing equality of women.

The proceedings were then led by Linda Matar, co-ordinator for the arab countries, from Lebanon.

She spoke of our solidarity with Cuba and Arab countries – especially Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq – and the aggression of Israel and the USA which are stealing oil and gas. People there are fighting because their homes and livelihoods are destroyed by the imperialists. "Let's raise our voices against the wall of racism that has been built around Palestine." "Listen to what the mass media are saying; the West are moving prisoners of the CIA across Europe. Western European governments know what's going on! Let's never forget the children and women in Lebanon, hiding from the bombs. Let's not forget Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, Darfur... They are the symbol of military globalisation. The Arab view is that these crimes are committed in the name of the 'Middle East Project' of Condoleza Rice. But our resistance continues. It is the heritage to our



children, a world without war, where equality and science prevails, for rights not destruction. It is not a wild dream, but a dream that will come true. President Chavez, on behalf of all Lebanese women and men, we want to express our thanks for your humanitarian support during the days of aggression by Israel and the USA against Lebanon, and for your braveness. On behalf of the Arab people, I wish president Chavez and the Venezuelan people liberty, sovereignty, independence and progress.

opening plenary session

THE session was opened By Maria Campos, WIDF President who apologised for the late start and explained that there was suspicion of a degree of sabotage against Chavez and that some Vice Presidents were attending a parliamentary briefing with MPs.

She said "the five organisations in Venezuela have united around a platform; this gives us a lot of hope for the future. Tremendous work has been done to organise the congress. They did well regarding hotels and flight tickets, but in some areas they had some difficulties and some of the conditions are not what we would have liked". She had set up working groups to look into these organisational problems, and into the food situation.

"This is the biggest congress since the fall of Russia as a socialist state. Women together will solve the problem."

This session included women from Columbia, Palestine, Japan, Zimbabwe, Cyprus, Cuba and the Philippines. All of these women spoke of the problems they faced and the campaigns that they were waging to improve the situation, especially for women. The Colombian delegate showed a DVD featuring the violence against the people by the government and

urged delegates to write to their embassies to protest about this situation and called for a day of solidarity on 17 July.

The Palestinian delegate asked for the help of the WIDF to obtain a Palestinian state where women could have social rights and be free from sexual violence and imprisonment. The WIDF and Red Cross were invited to visit the women in prisons to see them and the children who had been born in prison and whose births had not been registered. A proposal was put forward to create facilities for Palestinian young people to be able to study abroad, and for a broad-based delegation of the WIDF and others to visit prisoners and children born in prisons who have no kind of identification, in Palestine. This earned sympathy from delegates who were urged to consider this in their own countries. They emphasised the negative impact of the "wall".

Nuclear weapons were a major issue for the Japanese delegates who called for the USA to withdraw its bases from Japan as well as all other countries.

A representative from the Women's League of ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe acted as an apologist for Mugabe's current domestic policies. She claimed women had benefited

from the land redistribution programme and that women were in universities and held senior positions in decision making. She criticised Britain for not honouring its obligations to Zimbabwe and that sanctions were damaging women and children. The WIDF should be asking for the lifting of the illegal sanctions. This contribution flies in the face of the widespread international concern about Zimbabwe and also the information that NAW has received from people who have direct contact in that country. There was no support expressed for this contribution.

Cyprus called for the reunification of the country and for the WIDF to campaign against the multinational companies and the laws that are being brought in all over the world in the name of anti-terrorism. A representative from POGO/Cyprus presented a speech on behalf of the Greek Women's Federation representative who could not come for health reasons. She said that even EU policies follow US policies, in creating a "neo-liberal model for a new Europe".

The wife of one of the Miami 5 and the mother of another called for their release and against the illegal US blockade of Cuba. They thanked the WIDF and Venezuelan people for support and solidarity over 48 years of struggle. They stated that "people united will never be defeated and will keep fighting for peace and equality".

A delegate also praised the contribution of an outstanding group of Cuban workers in Venezuela who are contributing to support for workers around the world. Castro and Vilma Espan – founder of the Cuban Women's Federation – taught us that truth and justice should be the backbone of our lives and fighting together with the WIDF we are a stronger union fighting for a better world.

The Philippines delegate also thanked the organisation for its support for campaigns against persecution, stating that "people united will never be defeated and will keep fighting for peace and equality".

WIDF PRESIDENT MARCIA CAMPOS (RIGHT) MEETS HUGO CHAVEZ



workshop participation

BETWEEN us we covered five of the 10 workshops. Delegates were anxious to tell their stories, many of which were very moving, which as far as possible are reported in their own words. Unfortunately we can't print the full extent of these due to space. Many of these circumstances we have read in our press especially in the *Morning Star* but when told by the people who have suffered and witnessed the suffering of others first hand it gave rise to intense emotion and anger.

Amongst the various reports we have inserted photographs that do not necessarily relate to the text but were taken in break times and informal and social events. We felt that these images would add to the report.

the impact of state terrorism and imperialist wars on women

The session was opened by a Palestinian and a Lebanese speaker from the platform.

The Palestinian speaker graphically described the daily circumstances of their lives, and the "triple role of women" – as a partner in the fight to liberate the land from occupation, provider to meet the needs of the family, and to keep it united when men are persecuted or detained. Nevertheless, in this context we cannot ignore the problems of women fighting for equality,

against the violent and arbitrary measures of the occupation forces, closure of cities, bombardments, the occupation of houses, detention of family members – it touches everyone. She said that all these tensions lead to violence in the family. Domestic violence is one of the negative consequences on top of the general situation which is changing the relationship between men and women.

The occupation system also reinforces women's repression under traditional tribal systems. Women face many different forms of violence and live in a constant state of waiting, while men feel they have lost their position in society and in the family, and they therefore use force. She concluded with a proposed International Resolution to:

- Dismantle the Wall;
 - Remove the restriction to free movement;
 - End the detention of women and children;
- because all these prolong the conflict.

A sister representing the Women's Rights Commission of Lebanon spoke about the wars and that they too faced Israeli aggression. The feminist organisations in her country worked hard to end this aggression and went on to the streets to demonstrate. The WIDF had been contacted and had provided valuable support including through translations of messages

and appeals which were disseminated around the world. She said she would have liked to say a lot more but given the shortage of time she would give way to the floor.

Speakers from Columbia, Puerto Rico, Spain, Venezuela, Dominican Republic (speaking for Haiti) and a Kurdish delegate all brought greeting from their countries and expressed their solidarity with the women of the world whatever their struggle.

Ute Navidi, representing the NAW, gave solidarity greetings, saluting all women in the world fighting aggression and oppression. She spoke of the largest ever demonstration in London against the war in Iraq and the slogan "not in my name". The New Middle East project by the Bush regime and our own government's support for it meant that Western and Israeli state terrorism against the peoples of Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Palestine had to be challenged at the heartlands of imperialism. Ute linked these wars of aggression with the hypocritical position of Western governments which pursue racist asylum policies including the detention in prisons of women and children who are fleeing these wars. While warning of imperialist aggression against Iran, she argued against support for the Iranian regime which represses the Kurdish people and our Kurdish sisters, and progressive people and movements which challenge the regime. There was thunderous applause.

A Lebanese woman who lived in Venezuela said that "with our votes and with your love we can help defeat Bush and Blair. To hear the sister from England", she said, "even to hear just one woman from the imperialist country speak like this makes me feel relaxed and relieved". This sentiment was repeated by several speakers.

Venezuela proposed that the WIDF should have an observation agency to collate all these experiences of women. This should be an International Defence Office inside the WIDF and create an economic fund for displaced women and those who need urgent help.



VENEZUELAN WOMEN RESERVISTS
SUPPORTED DELEGATES
THROUGHOUT THE CONGRESS



the trafficking and merchandising of children

This workshop was in difficulty due to a lack of translation. One of the Portuguese delegates volunteered to translate between Portuguese, Spanish and English so that the workshop could start.

The theme was presented by Luzia Inga from Angola who likened trafficking to modern slavery and advised that the UN have defined trafficking in its protocol of 2000. This includes recruiting, transportation, taking advantage of vulnerability, using menaces, kidnapping, blackmail and also the taking of organs from vulnerable persons. Women have been trafficked for centuries as they are often regarded as goods within sexual commerce. Trafficking can take place within a country, not only over borders.

All countries need to co-operate and ratify international law to try and combat the problems. Proposals include:

- Adopting a strategy to fight trafficking
- Ratification of international instruments without reservation
- Adopting policies to fight poverty
- Education of all about the issues
- Involvement of local communities
- Development of the capacity to resist and fight against trafficking
- Improvement of national laws
- Promotion of open dialogue

regarding child protection regarding sex tourism

- Involvement of the media to inform and campaign.

There were 12 contributions to the debate from the floor, including one from NAW. Although time was limited some delegates had produced detailed papers (one was 35 pages in length). These delegates were reluctant to abide by the time limits which meant others who may have had points to raise did not get included in the session. Most speakers told of the problems in their own country and how they were campaigning. The Brazilians have a postcard campaign in hotels aimed at tourists and have government backing for their campaign, as do Israel, Angola and Argentina. Uruguay, Portugal, Bolivia and the Philippines are trying to get support from the government for their campaigns.

advancing women's equal rights to a) work and b) to reproductive and sexual health, education, social security, food and others

More than two hundred delegates attended this workshop which was introduced by the Greek representative.

The European Union was the 'prophet of the free market'; 44 per cent of those classed as 'inactive'

are working in black market conditions. Capitalism is the problem. The EU talks about employability but not jobs, and uses the term 'flexicurity'.

In 2007, working class women find themselves back in the mediaeval ages. Great Britain has a four per cent unemployment rate but this means 44 per cent part-time work.

The use of terminology in the presentation was not very sensitive to the audience, particularly failing to recognise its international make-up, ie. it felt rather Euro-centric.

A Syrian delegate talked about women's equality in Arab countries and the differences in the private and public sectors; women working in the former were not recorded in the statistics. The North Korean contribution focused on women's participation in economic life as equals with men. Women with three children receive eight hours wages for six hours work. The Palestinian floor speaker also said that there was no difference regarding gender in their labour market. There were many other contributions particularly from Latin America (Uruguay, Brazil, Cuba, Guyana), as well as from Israel.

The Greek President of the workshop summed up stating that the speeches had given a global picture, and that she would try to convey the results to the Plenary.

changing the negative role of the media in its presentation of women

This workshop did not attract any interest from European affiliates and the discussion centred on the experiences of Latin, American, Middle Eastern and Cuban delegates

A paper was presented Barbara Switzer, NAW President, who said that many countries represented here will have different experiences of how their media portrays women. Therefore this paper can only present the picture in general terms but with specific examples and stories from various countries. Its aim is to stimulate discussion that will develop into action to enable women to take their rightful



place in society throughout the world. The paper dealt with the issue under the following heading: identifying the problem; stereotyping; changes in the 21st century; decision making – power matters; setting standards, and how to achieve change (the paper is available on request).

Delegates from Venezuela and Cuba urged support for Chavez in not renewing the expired contract for one of the TV stations due to its role in undermining Chavez in the election process (this later attracted much media controversy around the world) which found general sympathy from other delegates.

As women struggle for authority in the media, research shows that the biggest difference is made by

those who work in the industry. Behind the scenes, they can have a definite impact on the ways women are portrayed on the screen and in print. While this may be so, action and support from all of us as individuals in our trade unions and by being vigilant about the enforcement of equality legislation so much more can be achieved.

More than 50 years ago, standards were set by journalists themselves, in the form of the Declaration of principles on the conduct of Journalists adopted by the Second World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists at Bordeaux on 25-28 April 1954 and amended by the 18th IFJ World Congress Helsingør on 2-6 June 1986.

Women in some countries face many serious problems and achieving change in this area can be a mountain too difficult to climb but those of us who can, should campaign for changes in our own country which will assist women everywhere.

Many countries will have codes of practice for the media in all its forms.

women in power and decision making

The paper was presented by Mozambique who stated that equality is a basic human right and that many things prevent women from leading fulfilling lives and that a life balance is needed. Women need to promote democracy and the advancement of other women.

Worldwide only 15.6 per cent of parliamentary representatives are women, which has increased from 10 per cent since 1998. Political systems and priorities need to be changed to give women the opportunities to use their experiences on the issues, such as peace and caring topics.

The success of many women's organisations has proved that women have leadership qualities but this experience is often not recognised by the ruling groups which remain the domain of men.

There are many obstacles to participation, lack of hospitals, water, transport, education and housing being some. Sophisticated women argue that a woman's place is not in the kitchen but many homeless women would be grateful to have a kitchen to cook for their family.

Women in power must not oppress other women. They should mobilise communities and educate the government departments in the needs of women. Not all power is in parliament. A strong women's movement is essential to ensure that changes in political leadership do not move women backwards.

Only a handful of countries have reached the 30 per cent target for women's representation in parliament. It emerged from those attending the workshop that the top ones are Rwanda, Sweden, Norway and Denmark.



BARBARA, UTE, VAL AND JUNE WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE ICELANDIC WOMEN'S ORGANISATION MFIK

closing congress

closing plenary session

This was the morning to complete the reports from workshops, pass resolutions and give the election results.

Many delegates put resolutions either with speeches or via the Chair of the session. Most of these were to be anticipated and were passed unanimously.

The NAW put forward two resolutions, the first supported by Sweden, Iceland and the Philippines, the second by Sweden and Iceland. These were:

1. This Congress condemns the support by Tony Blair, British Prime Minister, for the war in Iraq and Afghanistan under the banner of anti-terrorism and so-called democracy. Tony Blair and George Bush are war criminals as are the 18 governments who supported the war.
2. This Congress condemns the Islamic Republic of Iran's repression of women's progressive forces in Iran and of the Kurdish people, "the forgotten people".

Both were agreed unanimously, as were solidarity messages with Cuba, Colombia, Arab women, Puerto Rico and Korea.



final statement of congress

The Fourteenth Congress of the Women's International Democratic Federation held in Caracas from 8-14 April 2007, assumes the legacies of the historic struggles of women throughout the world.

Our 62 years of existence are rooted in the struggles of the women against fascism and for peace around the world. In December 1945 when we held our first world congress, women from 44 countries from the most remote regions brought with them the hope, the expectation, the conviction of better world without discrimination, without unemployment, without hunger; a vision of peace, worthy of being enjoyed.

The clear vibrancy of Madame Cotton, the first president of the WIDF still resounds clear when she spoke of the "legal status of women", the need to unite women in defense of our rights and those of our children, and the urgent need to raise a high degree of actions and determination to build lasting world peace.

Since then there has been a lot of water under the bridge: the Cuban revolution, the defeat of the US imperialism in Vietnam, the liberation of Asia and African colonies.

How can we not proclaim ourselves to be the heirs of the valiant Cuban women, the Vietnamese, the Palestinians, the Africans and the Asians? They are the examples that fill the WIDF and its women with pride and dignity. The world has changed, not always for the benefit of the great majority of the Universe but today, new winds blow over the planet and especially in Latin America.

It is no coincidence that our 14th Congress takes place in the Venezuela of Bolivar and Manuelita Saenz. The revolutionary process of Venezuela next to Cuba, the dignified and heroic beacon of America in nights of anguish, is the hope for our continent and the world.

For this reason and with the same passion, vehemence and the same commitment of that time we declare: we are the powerful heirs of the women who fought against

fascist Nazi Falangists, the Africans who fought against colonialism occupation, the soviet and European combatants. In recent history, the Vietnamese, the Cubans, the Salvadorians, the Guatemalans, the Nicaraguans, the Palestinians are those who in the most difficult conditions raised our rights: for our rights to vote, for a fair and equal wage, safe working conditions, health and social securities, equal treatment of women before the law. They are the workers, indigenous women, intellectual professionals, who always stood with people. The Venezuelan women who defended and continue to defend the Bolivarian Revolution even at the cost of their lives and their children.

We are and will be women in struggle to transform the world, to achieve continuing and sustainable well being with social, political, economic and gender justice, including the crucial struggle for the rights of working women.

We are women of all ages, creeds, faiths, identities, cultures; we are confident of our strength and commitment to life, responsive to the sufferings of our peoples, we open our hearts, our minds to the millions of human beings who need, want and are working to bring down the unjust economic social and patriarchal order that rules the world today imposed by Neo-liberal globalisation.

Because we want a peaceful world free from nuclear weapons, we denounce the imperialist military escalation across the planet in particularly the war of aggression sustained by the US government and its allies against Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine. We repudiate Plan Colombia, whose bloody tentacles extend to Ecuador and Venezuela; the attempt to appropriate the Guarani aquifer in the Triple Frontier; their aim of militarization establishing new military bases in this zone under pretext of terrorism.

Peace for us is not merely the absence of war or armed conflict; it is neither the peace of cemeteries nor the peace of the subjugation of our peoples. The peace we seek is

LIBERATION MARCH OF VENEZUELA



achieved through bread, work, health, education, free public social security, housing, and respect for difference, national sovereignty, economic and political independence, the integration of our nations. For us we will not have peace so long as the exploited, the hungry, the excluded, and the marginalised exist. For this reason it is necessary to change the capitalist system. It is also necessary to change the patriarchal system in order to eliminate the imbalance of power between men and women.

We want a world of equality between men and women where equal opportunities are real and effective. We condemn the undeclared war that transnational corporations have imposed with neoliberal policies giving way to world hunger, poor nutrition, misery, illiteracy, inequality, which particularly and powerfully affect women.

We condemn the invasion of

transnational media conglomerates whose informational and entertainment forms strive to eliminate our cultures and national identities.

We seek a world of sustained and sustainable development and demand decisive actions which will stem destruction of the environment which threaten life of the planet.

We seek a world where the rights of each citizen are respected, and demand the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women; displacement, trafficking and killing, including elimination of obstacles to equal access to resources and employment as the means to economic independence. We believe this can be achieved through the creation of a full citizenship, development of a legal, economic, social and ethical sense of life, building a historical project of participatory democracy. We cannot claim full citizenship exists if

people are hungry, marginalised, excluded, illiterate, and women are subject to patriarchy.

We want a world with full access to culture and knowledge for all, and demand the abolition of all ways and means used for the homogenisation and commercialisation of goods and services that has been transformed into the privileges of the rich and really are the patrimony of women and of all humanity.

For us empowerment is not limited to quotas of power, to vote and be elected. It is to take ownership of how we choose to lead our lives, to actively participate in assigning the plans for national developments, to have an active presence in the economic, social, and political decision-making sectors by this only we can affirm and execute our rights.

Empowerment is fundamentally building popular power that takes

men and women into account, the power which will make both men and women of our nations invincible in the face of imperialism. It means creating a different power which does not exploit, oppress, subjugate, which is capable of definitely destroying patriarchy and imperialism.

Women are not a sector, a group or topic. We are found in all spheres of society, and for this reason, we are convinced that it is our diversity which gives us the volcanic richness of our visions and proposals. This diversity is behind our creative initiatives, that undoes the mediocrity of one way of thinking.

For this reason our demand is based on the historic necessity of incorporating our accumulated experience, our reflection takes into account the present economic, social, cultural and political situation of each continent, each region, and each country which integrates our body.

This reflection enriches our daily practice, while allowing us to develop our theory as the Women's International Democratic Federation. That theory comes out of our own practice and action capable of incorporating the most advanced revolutionary and feminist thought.

election results

Executive Committee

President Marcia de Campos Pereira (Brazil)

Vice Presidents

Asia – Annie Raja, General Secretary, National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW)

Latin America – Maria Inês Brassesco, President, Argentina's Women's Organisation

Europe – Skevi Koukoumas, FDIM Women's Movement, POGO, Cyprus

Africa – Ruth Neto, Angolan Women's Union; Mayada Abbassi – Palestine Women's Union

Nine representatives from Europe (see European regional report)

NB. The EC was enlarged to 9 seats and this is the first time in many years that a seat has been allocated to the UK (NAW).



The formalities concluded, delegates departed to join the Venezuela Liberation March where the leader of each delegation were invited as VIP guest of Hugo Chavez, which for NAW was President, Barbara Switzer. The VIPs had expected to be meeting Hugo Chavez after the march but this was the result of unreliable translation as often happens in this situation but were seated in an elevated position at the side of the main platform with a magnificent view of the march. It seemed as though the whole of Venezuela had crowded into the streets.

liberation march of Venezuela

This march was to commemorate the release of Hugo Chavez. We marched from the Hilton Hotel through central Caracas to the Presidential Palace. Thousands of Venezuelans took part in a sea of red colours and the event was good natured and exuberant. We managed to get to a point about three blocks from the Palace where there was a video screen. While there, for about one hour, we had the chance to meet and talk to local people who were very generous in giving us food and water and helped us to organise transport back to the hotel. One man recalled how he and thousands of people were protesting against Chavez' capture five years earlier, and how everyone was in tears upon the news that he

had made it back alive. Hugo Chavez spoke to the marchers for several hours. We were left in no doubt about the support and affection for Hugo Chavez.

european regional meetings

The European delegates met several times. Due to frequent programme changes and the variety of venues, these meetings never contained delegates from all of the 16 European countries. However, it was agreed that Greece be the co-ordinating country for the European Region as Skevi Koukoumas the previous co-ordinator was to become a Vice President from Europe.

The nine countries with representatives on the WIDF Executive Committee were agreed as: Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Russia, Portugal, Iceland, UK, Italy, and Germany.

The European manifesto *What Women Want in Europe* was a very comprehensive document prepared by Dr Ute Navidi, NAW EC member, from contributions from European countries to be re-circulated for further comments.

This will be finalised at the WIDF's European Executive Committee meeting in Brussels in June 2008.

The situation regarding Israel remains to be clarified. While Israel is part of 'Europe' at the UN due to difficulties with the Arab nations, it was not clear if this should be the case in the WIDF organisation.

a conversation with Hugo Chavez



PRESIDENT
HUGO CHAVEZ
WITH MARCIA
CAMPOS, WIDF
PRESIDENT, ON
THE SCREEN

OPPOSITE the Hilton Hotel, where many conference delegates were accommodated, stands the Teresa Carreno Theatre, named after Venezuela's most famous classical pianist. This was the venue for the special session with the President. Even the long wait was an exhilarating if exhausting experience – groups of delegates from different countries, particularly the Latin American ones, bursting into chanting, singing, waving and dancing. The curtains opened and there, seated at a very large desk, was Hugo Chavez.

After various formal thanks to the Congress, Chavez said that he intended to have a "conversation" with the delegates; difficult given the scale and setting of the event. Nevertheless, his whole manner and style were truly conversational as he moved easily from personal anecdotes to political rhetoric, walked down from the stage to engage with women from different countries.

He said that it was an historical event to have the WIDF Congress in Latin America and to be part of women's struggle for justice and equality. He had been a macho, military man, who liked his drink but the influence of women, particularly his mother, first wife and daughters, changed this as he learnt to understand what an unfair and vio-

lent world it is for women. He asked Marcia Campos, WIDF President, how many women's movements made up the WIDF and was told 209. He said that this Congress must continue via the internet and email. Such women's movements must be the engines fuelling the working class movement.

He went on to acknowledge the debt to Fidel Castro and quoted Che Guevara "Revolution means equality and efficiency". He spoke of the large number of delegates from Latin America and spoke to several of them, concluding "This is a battle of ideas and of ideology". He welcomed delegates from areas such as the Middle East where US imperialism has caused chaos and exposed the flaws in the US plans to replace oil with bio fuels, saying that the land is needed to grow food for people not vehicles. Later he reflected on his nationalisation of the Orinoco Oil belt. He said that there is an ocean of oil, enough for 300 years, but that the private companies paid only a one per cent oil tax. Now there is a 30 per cent oil tax providing \$3.28 billion a year. This is going to the people and to agricultural development.

He moved on to tell of the time, "five years ago at a quarter past seven" when he was imprisoned in an attempt to overthrow him and

described events. This attempt had been defeated with Venezuelan women taking a decisive role on the streets where they had faced tanks. He called on all Venezuelan women to follow the path and take control; "no social programme exists which does not depend on women". For centuries capitalism has assigned women secondary roles and has excluded and mistreated them. They have risen above this as well as being housewives and raising children. On 25 May a TV channel will be given back to the people when its concession expires as there is a need for community and alternative media to break the grip of the western media. When he nationalised the telephone industry there had been great opposition but they must understand that "this is a worker's government and we don't want any blackmail". There is also a claim that it was more efficient when privately run. However, telephone charges in Venezuela were among the highest in Latin America as capitalism has its foundations in profits. There is no national revolution without international changes.

A woman from the Saharan Arab Republic (Western Sahara) raised the issue of the illegal occupation of their country by Morocco, asking for solidarity with her people whose human rights are being trampled on. Chavez told her that his foreign minister is communicating with them. "These former empires want to keep on dominating Western Sahara, the Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Their causes are part of our own fight. We are also talking with the President of Argentina about the return of the Falkland Islands to Argentina".

A woman from Argentina spoke next, a grandmother from the 'May Square' uprising 30 years ago, following which 30,000 people were detained or went missing. Her granddaughter was born in captivity and hasn't been found. She presented the president with a handkerchief with a small dedication and said that 30 years earlier she had hugged Fidel Castro. Chavez also acknowledged the role of Fanny Edelman, who was the oldest con-

CONGRESS DELEGATES SINGING,
WAVING AND CHANTING WHILST
WAITING FOR PRESIDENT CHAVEZ



ference participant, in the Spanish Civil War and in the WIDF.

As an alternative to FTA (the free trade agreement between the US and Latin America) Chavez and others have established ALBA, in which Latin American countries trade fairly and equitably. ALBA is the Bolivarian alternative for the Americas and now includes Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia and Nicaragua. Also, some CARICOM members are willing to join.

He said that ALBA could not be limited to agreements between governments but needed the involvement of people from all social movements. There should be an ALBA women's movement with specific programmes for Latin American women's movements. They have established a Bank of the South which several Latin American countries have joined. It has a wonderful programme and the income of the poorest people has

increased by 150 per cent due to income redistribution and micro-credit programmes. The Women's Bank charges one per cent interest. The Banks of the South need to start credit opportunities for financing institutions of the family and for new institutions. Socialism has to be this way – the transformation of the old and the introduction of the new. Inclusion and solidarity should be the values.

The Indian Women's Democratic Federation advised that in India from 1990 there has been continual privatisation of state run industries. President Chavez expressed solidarity with the people of India and recalled visiting Calcutta where there were hundreds of thousands of people on the streets, the Communist Party in power and women leaders in the Pancharats. He repeated that "without women it is impossible to defeat imperialism and capitalism.

"Women world-wide should be the sharp blade and living flame of revolution. The Latin American oligarchy calls me 'the crazy Chavez' and attacks me every day".

He moved to the Jordanian and Syrian delegates who told him that "300 million Arabs are with you. In Syria women have started calling their children Chavez. You are the brother and son of all Arab women". They presented him with a banner made in one of the refugee camps and some soil from Jordan plus a big hug from Syria and from the Arab people. Chavez had been to Damascus and said that Christianity must feed the revolution and the revolution feed Christianity.

A representative of the indigenous women of Peru spoke of the how pollution is affecting their land and that US companies are causing the most pollution. She asked that the President speak at the forthcoming summit on behalf of its people for the protection of the environment. She presented a present, a Peruvian doll, and a letter from the Mayor of Cuzco.

Finally he invited the mothers of the five Cuban heroes (the Miami 5 and currently in prison in the USA) onto the stage. They asked to meet Chavez's mother. He told them that they are in the vanguard of mothers who fight day after day for their children and that we must all move forward to prevent the destruction of any more countries by the USA. "We cannot bring up free women if we are slaves."

THE DELEGATION FROM
THE DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF KOREA WAIT
FOR THE CONVERSATION
WITH PRESIDENT CHAVEZ



social activity

After working hard from Monday to Friday and having had all the excitement of Chavez's speech and the Liberation March there was a bit of an anti-climax but this soon dispersed on Saturday when we were able to visit various projects in and around Caracas. This also gave us the opportunity to mix with the local people.

visit: Antimano

Ute Navidi and Val Duncan went to Antimano, a suburb on the south hillside of Caracas, to meet the women who had set up a collective for self help in their neighbourhood. Everyone introduced themselves. They were shown a clinic for children set up in the front room of a small house and went on to the local radio station which was situated above the children's school. Representatives of each country were asked to make a short broadcast. Ute did this for the UK and Val made a short presentation to the group of women. While Ute was on air, Val talked to the women and children about local projects. She discussed the scheme for providing better and more reliable water supplies to the residents. The women said that communication was a big problem and asked for copies of our magazines. They hoped to start one of their own. We gave each of them a National Assembly of Women badge.

visit: Caracas mobile library

Barbara Switzer joined the Swedish delegates who went to visit the Caracas mobile library organisation which held lectures, literary classes as well as story time sessions for children. It was a very inspirational and colourful establishment with an excellent exhibition of its development through the years.

This project is supported by the Swedish government as well as Coca Cola and other businesses. We questioned the involvement of Coca Cola but were given an assurance that their involvement was purely financial and they had no control or involvement in policy and activity.

The mobile activity was through-

NAW SECRETARY
VAL DUNCAN ADDRESSING
WOMEN AT ANTIMANO



NAW EC MEMBER
UTE NAVIDI WITH
WOMEN AT ANTIMANO



JUNE PLYMAN (RIGHT)
RELAXING AT AN
OUTDOOR CELEBRATION



THE CARACAS MOBILE LIBRARY NOW - AND, BELOW, BEFORE



out Venezuela and not too many years ago was done on foot with donkeys. Today thanks to support and sponsorship there are two vehicles.

congress dinner

The final event of Congress was the farewell dinner which was indeed a gala occasion with many sisters in their national costumes. Once the speeches, which were a bit difficult to follow with such a variety of languages requiring translation and congratulations and thanks to all those involved in bringing the Congress about were over, we were finally able to relax and enjoy the excellent food and splendid colourful traditional entertainment, song and dance.

We were looking forward to having an opportunity to see more of Venezuela the next day but due to some disastrous double booking at the hotel which required everyone moving into alternative rooms which took many hours, this was not to be. Chaos reigned right up to our departure on Monday which was massively delayed due to having to wait for the delegates from

another hotel to go to the airport.

We caught our planes by the skin of our teeth and three of us arrived at Heathrow the next day (minus our luggage which was fortunately delivered later that day). Val had to sprint from one terminal to another in Germany to catch her connection to Newcastle.

conclusions

The experience could be described as a 'Venezuelan adventure' as there were many twists and turns, with unexpected difficulties and sometimes frustrating experiences requiring much patience and tolerance. It was at the same time an interesting, enjoyable, and exciting. Our hosts were generous, and the many volunteers, both women and men, made us feel warmly welcome throughout. Meeting many women

from a range of countries was one of the most valuable parts especially the social visits which gave an insight into the progress of Venezuela itself. We had all experienced major marches in our own countries but nothing matched the liberation march which was an exhilarating event which included the military and security forces.

In spite of the difficulties, holding the Congress in Venezuela was a good decision politically. It put the spotlight on its achievements, and gave the people an audience and support around the world which otherwise would not have been possible.

We congratulate the WIDF and the Venezuelan Coordinating Committee for having the confidence and courage to make the Congress a reality. The generosity of Venezuela in financing all the accommodation and in many cases travel costs meant that many more delegates were able to participate. It undoubtedly placed the WIDF on the world map and it will have learned much for its own future organisation and development.

The NAW wishes to record our thanks to Thompson's Solicitors, ASLEF Leeds Branch and Unison for their generous donations towards the cost of the visit and this report, and the WIDF itself which contributed \$1,000 in recognition of the role the NAW had played in making the congress a reality.

THE NAW DELEGATION ENJOYS A FINAL DINNER WITH THE SISTERS FROM ICELAND





Women's International Democratic Federation

Guimaraes Passos Street, 422
Vila Mariana
Sao Paulo, SP, Brazil, 04107 031
Telephone 00 55 11 5082 44 18
email fdim.sec@terra.com.br
www.fdim-widf.com.br



National Assembly of Women

92 Wansbeck Avenue
Cullercoats, Tyne & Wear NE30 3DJ
Telephone 0191 252 0961
email naw@sisters.org.uk
www.sisters.org.uk

This report was compiled by Barbara Switzer, NAW President, with contributions from Val Duncan, Dr Ute Navidi, June Plyman, and Gemma Tumelty, and designed and typeset by Megan Dobney