

# *A. C. W. W. and The United Nations*

*by Agnes Bradbury*

Do you feel that the United Nations has fulfilled the role it was given at its inception? Do you know the aims of the U.N. specialised agencies or how they carry these out? Some four years ago, before I became the representative of F.W.I.O. at A.C.W.W. and then, a member of the U.N. Committee of that organization, my answer to both questions would have been an unqualified 'no.' Like so many other people, all my impressions of the workings of the U.N. in New York were based on what I read in newspapers or saw on television, and none of this was very reassuring. Surely it was nothing more than a talking shop, not at all what was envisaged at its birth amid general international goodwill and universal high hopes. Fortunately for mankind, there is a whole programme of work going steadily forward which rarely makes the headlines but which fully justifies the U.N.'s existence in spite of the ideological pigheadedness and political jiggery-pokery of many of its members on the floor of the General Assembly. And it is the function of the U.N. Committee of A.C.W.W. to discuss and plan ways and means of sharing in this programme, as I discovered at the first meeting I attended in 1967. What a jumble of impressions I took away from that first day! My head was spinning, with such terms as UNESCO, NGO's, FAO, INGO's and ECOSOC swirling about like thick alphabet soup. I was sure of only one thing, it was all interesting, and important in a way I didn't quite understand yet, but which would become obvious with a little effort on my part. So began my conversion, from a scoffer and unbeliever to a dedicated supporter and active propagandist of the role of the U.N. specialist agencies. Little by little I have been able to piece together the story of these and of the way A.C.W.W. has been able to work with them for the general betterment of life in the rural community and of the lot of rural women.

Looking back to the time after the war when statesmen were drawing up the Charter of the United Nations, I found that these architects of a better world saw the organisation not only as a peacekeeping body but also as a means of hastening and helping the economic, social, cultural, technical, agricultural development of the world. Things were in a mess and it would take more than the policeman or the

soldier to put it right. Armies of teachers, advisers, doctors, nurses were needed to fight poverty and hunger and ignorance. There was set up, therefore, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to coordinate the work of several specialised agencies which would carry out programmes of aid in specified areas of activity. So UNESCO (U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) would function in those fields indicated by its name while FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) would deal with the production and use of food. Naturally it was hoped that the agencies would work together where possible. There are others like WHO and ILO but ACWW does not work directly with them. All come under the umbrella of ECOSOC acting as coordinator and in turn responsible to the U.N. ACWW takes an interest in certain commissions which also come under ECOSOC, namely those on Human Rights, Social Development and the Status of Women.

Thanks to the pioneer work done by some of its dedicated members, ACWW was in at the birth of both FAO and UNESCO and was invited to send representation to the first meeting of the former in Quebec, October, 1945, and of the latter in London in November of that same year. The infant U.N. agencies were aware of the value of close cooperation with international organisations of integrity and vision which were free from the warping influence of politics. Therefore, they decided to offer what they chose to call 'consultative status' to certain selected 'non-governmental organisations' (NGO's) of repute. The membership of the agencies was made up of representatives of states: now they were seeking a relationship with groups of people involved in fields of interest which might well be worldwide. Across the warp of national interest would be woven the woof of international experience to produce the cloth of total involvement. ACWW was offered consultative status with ECOSOC and FAO in 1947, then with UNESCO in 1949. This it has maintained to date, even after the U.N. carried out a drastic reappraisal recently of the whole system and challenged all organisations with status to submit a dossier of their activities and to present themselves before a selection committee. Many limbs were lopped, but when the dust had settled, ACWW had come through with honour and had retained its status.