

The Role of Women in National Development

An Address by Ambassador Inga Thorsson

Ambassador Thorsson opened her address with the following statement: "The theme of this conference is 'Pathways to Progress.' Let me state at the very beginning and very emphatically that there exist no pathways to progress that are not marked by a clear recognition of the decisive importance of man himself, the be-all and end-all of development for whatever successes might be attained toward this goal. There is, in other words, no way around the human factor; progress depends primarily on human qualities."

Mrs. Thorsson then commented that this international conference was an appropriate chance to devote some time to this subject since there now appears to be a breakthrough to new thinking in international debate on the importance of the attitudes and behaviour of man himself for development.

The period of the 1970s is considered the second United Nations Development Decade (D.D.2) and the world community has now pledged itself to promoting the betterment of living conditions and sharing of world resources. This goal can only be achieved through the collective and individual efforts of men and women everywhere in poor and rich countries alike.

Is there a place for the role of women in the strategy devised by the member nations of the U.N.? asked the speaker and the reply was, "The participation of women in the political, economic, social and cultural life of their countries is increasingly becoming a necessity if we are to be able to solve national and international problems." Also, "A society cannot be transformed without making use of women's energies and capacities."

"There is no country in the world today where women in a self-evident way take their place in society as fully equal citizens."

Referring to the report of the strategy laid down in the Second U.N. Development Decade for goals to be achieved by 1980, the speaker emphasized that her personal first point would be spreading the widest amount possible of literacy among women. She said, "There are few factors that exclude a person or a group of people more effectively from taking part in the process of development and modernization than illiteracy. It is an obstacle to any effort aiming at bringing women over to the modern sector of a developing society. It creates a gap right within families between mothers and children, in a time when bridging gaps of all kinds must be a matter of highest importance. The spreading of mass literacy

would be an expensive program. We have today 800 million illiterate persons, the great majority of them women. An estimate of the costs involved is \$6 per person, i.e. \$4.8 billion to eradicate illiteracy. But 40 times that amount is today spent annually on armaments.

"The second point would be the urgent need to enlarge family planning programs wherever possible and acceptable, in rich and poor countries alike. The quantitative problem of the population explosion is well known, but less attention has been paid to the importance of family planning programs in terms of their qualitative effects on the levels of living of individual families and the liberation of women's energies by diminishing the number of child-births of the individual woman."

In conclusion, Ambassador Thorsson said, "I find the greatest obstacle against equality in opportunities, rights or responsibilities between men and women not to be economic conditions, or lack of financial resources within the countries concerned, but prejudiced thinking, so painfully slow to relinquish its hold, despite legislation, in the minds of men and some women, that women are not equal.

"One important element of the U.N.D.D. 2 strategy is provision for a continuous review of performances during the decade. For this purpose the United Nations is planning a small mid-term conference. Such initiatives reflect the urgent need to see that women must not be a retarding force in the country's future development, but must be strong advocates for progress, playing their full and significant role as equals in helping to build a better, more just and human society."

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A JANUARY MORNING

The glittering roofs are still with frost; each worn
Black chimney builds into the quiet sky
Its curling pile to crumble silently.
Far out to the westward on the edge of morn,
The slender misty city towers up-borne
Glimmer faint rose against the pallid blue;
And yonder on those northern hills, the hue
Of amethyst, hang fleeces dull as horn.

And here behind me come the woodmen's sleighs
With shouts and clamorous squeakings; might
and main
Up the steep slope the horses stamp and strain,
Urged on by hoarse-tongued drivers — cheeks
ablaze,
Iced beards and frozen eyelids — team by team,
With frost-fringed flanks, and nostrils jetting
steam.

Archibald Lampman

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