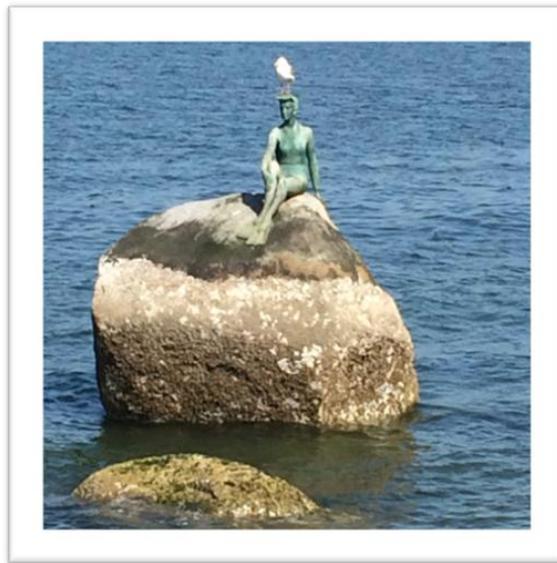


CELEBRATION for CEDAW*

**DURING
SECOND WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN
COPENHAGEN, DENMARK 1980**

THE PROMISE AND THE PROPHECY

***UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF
ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**



***The Little Mermaid, Copenhagen, Denmark
Bronze sculpture by Edvard Eriksen, 1913***

A fictional dramatization of a historical event by Jill Follows and the Human Rights Special Interest Group. humanrights.sig@gmail.com 2024. All rights reserved.

At the request of the “*Cities for CEDAW History and Futures Project*”

CHARACTERS:

Host _____ (name)
Conference Delegate 1 (D1) _____ (name)
Conference Delegate 2 (D2) _____ (name)
Conference Delegate 3 (D3) _____ (name)

SYNOPSIS FOR CAST:

We follow three women around the city of Copenhagen, Denmark as they talk about the promises, setbacks, and joy at the 1980 Second World Conference on Women and its celebratory Signing Ceremony for CEDAW-the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The following play/podcast is a fictional dramatization of a historical event.

RUN OF SHOW:

Background music starts and then fades as HOST begins talking.

HOST: Three delegates from women’s advocacy organizations renew their friendship in the summer of 1980 at the Second World Conference on Women in Copenhagen. All three women attended the FIRST World Conference on Women in Mexico City five years earlier and look forward to picking up where they left off. They are grateful for the opportunity to serve as delegates to the SECOND World Conference on Women and especially look forward to witnessing the official Signing Ceremony for the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women- otherwise commonly called CEDAW.

Let’s listen in.

D1: (coffee cups clinking) This is a great spot. The smorrebrod looks delicious. How did you find this café?

D2: I looked for a café that was near the harbor so we could sit outside and bask in this warm summer breeze. I left New York City yesterday and it was warm there too, but there aren’t that many cafés with a water view. This café is also as far away from the conference as I could find. At least, sitting here, we can talk about the sessions without interruption.

D1: Had I known the sessions on women's health care, employment and education would be sidetracked by protestors in the hallways, I may have steered clear of the conference. On the other hand, the disarray at the convention is no worse than the ruckus I have every day with my children back in Nairobi.

D3: There is a standing invitation to visit me in England, If you ever feel the need to get away from the ruckus. And now, tell me... What are the protests about?

D1 Today's protesters are mostly opposed to apartheid and the Israeli occupation of the occupied territories. I probably should have expected the protesters because I've prepared for this conference by staying up night after night reading reports from the UN and various organizations.

D3: I think we should look to CEDAW for recourse and use it to find ways to solve problems that discriminate against women.

D1: Maybe I'm being cynical, but I bet those issues will be with us a long time. Is this the time when I get on my soapbox and tell women to VOTE for human rights policies?

D2: I attended a session yesterday where the American feminist Bella Abzug questioned a panel of women from Iran about their government's demand that women wear "modest" clothing. The panel of women did not have a problem with it.

D3 I suppose the good news is that women from Iran are allowed to attend the conference in the first place. At the very least, they hear from other women that there is worldwide support for movements that try to regain women's freedom from government overreach.

D1: I imagine you already know that Copenhagen was selected as the site for this conference because of the recent revolution in Iran. The conference was supposed to be held in Tehran. It's only been about one year since Iran's government was overthrown and Sharia law was imposed. The new religious cleric withdrew Iran's commitment to host the Second World Conference on Women in Tehran.

D2: Many of us worked hard to get here. I'm going to use this time to celebrate women and our causes, not the least of which is the UN's adoption of CEDAW last December... Can you believe that the UN adopted CEDAW only 7 months ago?

D1: Time flies, doesn't it. I like that the UN Secretary General, Kurt Waldheim, called specifically for the CEDAW Signing Ceremony. The Signing Ceremony is the first step toward ensuring that CEDAW enters into legal force.

D3: I hope that the Signing Ceremony for CEDAW comes off without a hitch. It should be impressive to watch government representatives, one after another, sign CEDAW.

D2: There will have to be many versions of CEDAW available for signature. Just think a minute about the different languages CEDAW had to be translated into before the ceremony.

D3: Let's just hope we get into the room. It only holds 600 people. Most of us will have to watch the ceremony on tonight's television news shows, and that assumes the networks even carry it.

D1: Even if we don't get to watch the ceremony in person, we can share the news that CEDAW was adopted last December unanimously by a vote of 130-0 by the UN Member States. And CEDAW's adoption came at record-breaking speed.

D2: I figure that the UN Member States looked in the mirror last December and asked themselves, does a vote for CEDAW threaten anyone? If the answer is no, then we shall vote in favor of it. At least they got that right.

D3: I kind of expect some countries to ratify CEDAW on the one hand and then file reservations to it on the other hand. Those reservations will minimize the impact of CEDAW. For sure, Iran is one of the countries that will file reservations.

D2: I understand that the official United States delegation met many times in the months leading up to Copenhagen. Interestingly, the delegates did not talk about CEDAW. Perhaps that is why, on the eve of the US team of delegates' departure for Copenhagen, President Jimmy Carter issued a written statement and threw his support behind CEDAW. He said that the US is deeply committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination and will continue to work for equal rights at home and abroad. He even authorized Sara Weddington to sign CEDAW at the Copenhagen *Signing Ceremony*.

D3: I know Sara Weddington personally and I am impressed that she is an ardent supporter of women's reproductive freedoms. In fact, she represented Ms. Roe in the pivotal case before the US Supreme Court dealing with a woman's right to secure an abortion.

D2: I'm really close to getting on my soapbox and talking about the outsized influence religion has on women's human rights, but we're sitting in this lovely café, enjoying the view of the famous Little Mermaid statue in the harbor, and might instead want to think about our prophecies for CEDAW. You know, mermaids are well known for their prophecies. Why don't we head back to the conference and think about that before we next get together?

D3: Good idea. I don't want to miss the Signing Ceremony for CEDAW.

D1: What do you say - - - shall we meet here again tomorrow, grab a cup of hot chocolate and a warm Danish pastry?

D2 and D3 say YES

INTERLUDE

Synopsis: The three friends bump into each other in a salon at the convention center following the Signing Ceremony for CEDAW.

D3: Funny bumping into you again, and so soon! What did you think of the Signing Ceremony?

D1: I thought it was rather solemn. I counted 64 country representatives walking proudly across the stage, signing the register, and committing to abolish persistent forms of inequality and discrimination against women in all their forms.

D2: At least symbolically they did. 64 out of the 145 UN Member States participated in the Signing Ceremony.

D3: Equally impressive... Cuba and Guyana took the next step and RATIFIED CEDAW during the Signing Ceremony. They joined Sweden which had already gotten the jump on everyone. Sweden ratified CEDAW before the conference even started.

D2: The Signing Ceremony was brief, but it had a big impact on me. I feel energized.... ready to go home and push for adoption of CEDAW.

D1: It's likely and troubling that some of our sisters will have a harder time with it. Their fight will be for basic human rights like the right to own and control property, to receive an inheritance, keep their own nationality and even keep custody of their children after divorce.

D3: A quote by acclaimed author Margaret Mead comes to mind. She said, Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

D1: I feel motivated too. But I confess that I'm disappointed that The Signing Ceremony wasn't a bigger PR event. If you think about it, there are thousands of women, from all over the world, in attendance at this conference. They represent over 130 NGOs or their governments. Each woman I saw was enthusiastic and energetic. Each one would probably have paid the media for an interview, just so CEDAW could spread around the world in every possible direction and in every possible language. And yet, the press seems to give lackluster coverage to the Signing Ceremony.

D2: The press seems to be focusing way too much on the protestors.

D1: On that not so upbeat note, let's remember that we don't have to let despair have the last word. Shall we call it a night and regroup in the morning at the café? We must check out the Little Mermaid and share our prophecies for CEDAW.

INTERLUDE

D2: Good morning. How about that statue? The Little Mermaid looks so young. She can't be more than a teenager. And yet, according to prophecy, mermaids live 300 years.

D1: Since we don't have that much time, who wants to go first with their prophecy?

D3: I prophesize that CEDAW will start off strong. Lots of countries will adopt CEDAW, partly because it plays well to show support for women's human rights. But let's get real. Many will likely disregard CEDAW or attach reservations as a concession to their country's religious values and patriarchal customs. It's more important for many to squelch women's voices, keep them in the home and out of the government.

D1: My prophecy is that CEDAW will not reach its goals during our lifetime or even, for that matter, during the 300-year lifetime of a mermaid.

D2: Talking about time.... after we split up last night, I went back to the convention and heard a speaker say women must be prepared for a long and patient struggle to achieve equality.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmHM44oIJDc> starting at second 25 and stopping at second 36)

So, here is my prophecy - - Women will not stand for a slow and painful struggle. Women will push forward for equality and justice and peace in the coming years, especially at the grassroots level. The mermaids can keep their tails and live until the year 2280. But WE, grassroots advocates like you and I, don't have the luxury of 300 years to get the job done. Don't even get me started.

D3: I was too excited to sleep too, so I caught the beginning of the speech by the delegate from Zimbabwe. She called on each of us to bring action now against authorities that discriminate against women.

(<https://legal.un.org/avl/ha/cedaw/video01.7.html> Starting at 1:09:50 and stopping at 1:10:02)

D2: I applaud her activism but how can the UN lead us all on CEDAW when women are underrepresented at the UN itself?

D1: That is my concern as well. I've heard that only 8% of the UN delegates and UN employees are women. It's mind boggling that while the UN is aware of this imbalance it doesn't seem to be taking steps to address it.

D3: Do you remember Eldridge Cleaver, the writer of *Soul on Ice* and a prominent political activist in the Black Panther Party in the US? Well, he's well known for having said that if you are not part of the solution then you are part of the problem.

D2: Do you think the press coverage of this conference is part of the problem or the solution? I overheard the editors of the official NGO Forum report claim that no qualified woman could be found to be its publisher. That doesn't make sense to me, especially when there are over 1,200 journalists at this Conference.

D1: That reminds me of the TIME magazine cover story a couple years ago when the journalist said the feminist movement in the US had led ENOUGH women to deliberately take possession of their lives, that this movement was equivalent to the discovery of a new continent.

D3: I think... if any newsworthy event was equivalent to the discovery of a new world, it was probably the first walk on the moon by humans. That's a bit much, don't you think? The article PRE-dates CEDAW by at least a decade. If ENOUGH women had taken possession of their lives already, then why is CEDAW needed?

D2: I wonder what TIME magazine meant by ENOUGH women. Was it referring to the few who made headlines, got into the C-suite, or filled allotted seats for women in medical, law, and other professional schools?

D1: We need to get back to the aims of CEDAW and the protection of human rights for ALL women, not just ENOUGH women. The idea that the success of a few women trickles down to ENOUGH women has been debunked.

D3: No doubt we're riding on the coattails of ENOUGH exceptional women, but those women persevered to make CEDAW a reality for ALL women. The activists, the intellectuals, the storytellers, the educators...they all fought for a breakthrough. CEDAW reflects many breakthroughs, including one I particularly applaud. It is the requirement that signatory nations be held accountable for submitting reports on the steps they've taken to implement women's human rights.

D2: Another breakthrough is CEDAW's creation of a committee of experts- experts from all over the world- experts who engage in dialogues with ratifying nations, and review and assess a country's progress.

D1: CEDAW also recognizes people like us accountable for promoting women's human rights. I think we are particularly well-suited to draw the CEDAW Committee's attention to the struggles of women in our own communities. Isn't that what Eleanor Roosevelt said in the first place? She said something like human rights begin in small places close to home.

(Start playing upbeat music that can be overridden by the closing remarks below.)

D2: I expect we will face push back when we go home. But women's human rights are worth fighting for every day, in our local communities and in our national governments. CEDAW is the best platform for change and the reward from its implementation will be seen in the warmth of a woman's smile and the spring in her step.

D1: And on that note, and in case I don't see you before we head home.... See you in 5 years in Nairobi at the Third World Conference on Women. We can check up on our prophecies.

THE END