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Harold Taylor

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## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR: WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

[By Virginia Y. Trotter, Assistant Secretary for Education, Department of  
Health, Education, and Welfare]

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When approached with the request to participate in the National Agricultural Outlook Conference, I accepted with genuine pleasure. I was, of course, delighted to have an opportunity to address this distinguished audience of professional colleagues and personal friends on a subject of prime interest and concern to me—equal rights and opportunities for women and how this is being encouraged through the International Women's Year. But I was particularly excited knowing the opportunities which challenge each of you to take the goals and aspirations of the International Women's Year and to translate them into effective and efficient actions to improve the lives of all people in your communities.

In my remarks today, I will broadly address the concept and ideals of International Women's Year—what its goals of equality, development and peace mean to women *and* men around the world, and what challenges lie before us in implementing these goals. But I will focus on the goal of development—because this is where you can play a particularly strong role—where you have a mandate.

It has been a scant two hundred years since our Nation's founders faced a similar challenge and boldly declared: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." In those two hundred years, we have built resolutely on their foundations of freedom and social justice. We have expanded their declaration from "all men are created equal" to "all humankind is created equal." We have filled the first chapter of our national history as few people or countries could have dreamed: We have developed technologies to supplement and complement every phase of our life. We have economic and educational standards of living which are envied and imitated throughout the world.

But the success of our national endeavor is most clearly shown by our willingness to acknowledge our mistakes and our foibles. We readily admit, for example, that we have not achieved a society free of prejudice and discrimination—the society of equal opportunity ideally envisioned by the framers of the Constitution.

We still have need for courts to order the integration of races; we still need legislatures to re-affirm the rights of women. But in working toward the ideal, our society is fortunate that these causes—and others which would nurture and improve our society—have articulate advocates.



One of the areas of national and world concern most in need of articulate and resolute leadership is the movement toward equal rights for women. We can be proud that American women now in the front lines of our national effort to rekindle the spirit of our first revolution are looked to as the standard bearers for the worldwide women's movement. It is the conviction of these American women, and women, globally, that the goals of equality, development and peace—the goals of the International Women's Year—are not goals for *women*, but serious goals for our world society and that men—no less than women—stand to gain.

Too often in the past, women's rights have been considered independently of human rights, and women's problems regarded as somehow removed and separated from the "real" problems confronting society. Ironically, "separate" International Women's Year is conceived precisely to break through such separatist thinking by demonstrating this interdependence of world problems and women's inferior status. It is time to acknowledge that the worldwide denial of women's rights and opportunities is at the very root of our development problems and socio-economic ills—including illiteracy, malnutrition, mass poverty and unchecked rates of population growth.

Looking back to the beginning of the evolution toward an International Women's Year, we recall that it was in 1946 that the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women was established, and that it was in 1967 that the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. The original Resolution to establish the International Women's Year was initiated in 1972 by the Commission on the Status of Women, elected by the United Nations Economic and Social Council from 32 countries. In December 1972, the year 1975 was chosen because it was midpoint in the United Nations' Second Development Decade, which has as one of its goals the integration of women in the development process.

In January of this year, when President Ford signed the Executive Order which made possible the creation of a National Advisory Commission, he said in part: "International Women's Year is not just for women. It is for all people dedicated to seeing that the highest potential of each human being is reached."

The plans of this International Women's Year Presidential Commission include in-depth studies in the following areas: Media; enforcement of the law; reproductive freedom; international interdependence; homemakers; women with special problems; arts and humanities; women in power; equal rights commission; and child development.

In late June, 6,000 women—and men, too—came more than 130 countries to Mexico City for the World Conference on International Women's Year. This Conference served to focus world attention dramatizing the issues of eliminating discrimination against women and of integrating women into development, and to develop practical and realistic measures to achieve the goals of International Women's Year. The key to the success of the Conference was our comprehension that these matters are universal in nature, are interdependent, and can only be tackled through cooperation and mutual understanding.

Approval was given at the Conference to a World Plan of Action seeking to promote the three major International Women's Year goals—equality, development and peace. Although the plan is projected for the 1975–85 decade, it points to a number of urgent “minimum” targets for the first five-year period. These include a marked increase in women's literacy; equal enrollment in primary schools; and more job training and opportunities with equal pay for equal work. They also include provisions for equality in the exercise of civil, social, political, and legal rights, with increased participation of women in policy-making positions at the local, national, and international levels.

Other World Plan targets include better health insurance, nutrition, medical care and availability of family planning services; the development of modern rural technology, and other means of reducing the heavy workload of women; and recognition of the economic value of women's role in the home, in domestic food production and marketing, and in voluntary activities not traditionally remunerated.

Simultaneous with the World Conference, which was for official government delegations and observers, a Tribune was held in Mexico City for members of nongovernmental organizations as well as interested individuals, where a formal program was held daily. Among the many Tribune panels and perhaps of greatest specific interest to this Conference, was one on Agriculture and Rural Development. Panelists included women from Mexico, Tanzania, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Among the recommendations brought out by this panel were suggestions on the problem of illiteracy, the need for education and training, the implementation of cooperatives, and the need for women in the decisionmaking process.

Efforts and events in celebration of International Women's Year are coordinated in the United States by the U.S. Center for International Women's Year. The Center, located in Washington, D.C., is nonpolitical and nonpartisan in nature and functions as a clearinghouse for information. The Center “spreads the word” about International Women's Year, provides materials on what is being done here and abroad, and coordinates governmental and voluntary activities in observance of International Women's Year.

The Center is assisted by the National Advisory Committee and a Government Liaison Advisory Committee, the former composed of representatives of approximately 75 nongovernmental organizations based in Washington, and the latter with women from the various governmental departments such as Agriculture; Interior; Health, Education, and Welfare; and so forth.

Perhaps you have heard about the International Women's Year Salute to Women calendar which alphabetically by month features women in different careers. For example, January with the letter “A” honored women in Aeronautical Science, Astronomy, and Atomic Science. February featured women in Business, Industry and Labor; March, women in Communications; April, women as Doers or Volunteers. May, women in Education; and June, women in Farming and Natural Resources. The calendar continues with July honoring women in Government; August, women as Homemakers; September.



International; October, Joy and Kindness; November, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Administration, Secretarial Work; and December, Minds and Hearts of People—Spiritual and Aesthetic Values.

During each month, conferences and meetings are held, providing the opportunity to highlight women of achievement, their motivation, the factors that influence their performance—in fact to show that their advancement is also the advancement of humanity as a whole.

When we think about International Women's Year, many naturally want to focus on what women are doing in foreign countries. Admittedly, the status of women differs significantly from country to country, due to cultural, political, economic, and social factors. There are also wide divergencies in the condition of women within countries themselves, particularly between rich and poor, rural and urban, privileged and underprivileged. But I do not see a conflict between the prevailing conditions in developing and industrialized countries as regards the real aspirations of women for social justice and a better life. In fact, women throughout the world share so many problems that they can and must support and reinforce each other in a joint effort to create a better world.

We must keep in mind that men and women are equally affected by the future of our world. It is, therefore, their joint responsibility to determine their common destiny. Men cannot claim an exclusive right to shape the future of our world. It is time for them to accept the challenge and share with women in the decisionmaking process. It is a special challenge for women to assume these decisionmaking responsibilities. In practice, however, this will only be possible when women are no longer denied equal opportunities and when men share in full the responsibilities traditionally assigned to women in the family.

And equal opportunities begin with education. It has been said that women's full equality will come about as a result of their being educated and joining the work force. However, if this is to happen, we must take into account not only number but also the type of education and the type of work offered them.

As long as the instruction which women receive continues to be based on old prejudices, that instruction itself will limit their potential. And as long as the jobs to which women have access continue, as a consequence of that same instruction, to be jobs which merely support men's work, we shall be very far from achieving the equality which we are calling for.

You who are here today have perhaps the most important role to play in implementing the World Plan of Action. Our U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Joseph J. Jova, has said: "Real change and real equality will not take place in a vacuum . . . Things cannot be as they were before. How it will be apparently is in our hands."

National and international conferences help in determining priorities and strategies, but it is you here today who must assume the responsibility to make the goals of the year a reality. You are instrumental in communicating new ideas from Washington to State Program Leaders in Extension Home Economics—*Use* this forum to open the flow of ideas to improve our society. You are instrumental in the development of educational materials that will reach homemakers, 4-H youth and others—innovate, inspire them to strive for an improved quality of life for our nation.

The task we have before us is clear and precise. We are to implement the World Plan of Action to achieve the integration of women as participants on an equal footing with men in the effort to achieve full development, at the same time eliminate discrimination based on sex, and achieve the fullest collaboration of women in strengthening international peace. The Preamble of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the basis for the World Plan of Action discussions in Mexico City, contains the statement: "The full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world, and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women as well as men in all fields." Those of us who were fortunate enough to attend the World Conference can reach out in only a small way to promote awareness of International Women's Year and to encourage a new era of participation by women in all matters—not only in matters of exclusive concern to them.

We have had "International Years" before—they were conceived in hope and have borne fruits beyond the wildest expectations of the year's authors. One of the years which excited the best of our national and international imaginations was the International Geophysical Year. We dreamed and acted—and we reached the moon. Now we are in the International Women's Year—it's time to reach out again.

The success of International Women's Year—with its Plan of Action for 1975 and for future years—depends entirely on you. From my experience with you and from the caliber of your contributions in the past, I know you will succeed.