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# WHAT DOES "SECURITY" FOR WOMEN MEAN?\*

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*\*This paper was presented at the 1985 International Women's Peace Conference held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada on 5-9 June.*

*L'année dernière Vilma Núñez de Escorcía, du Nicaragua, présenta cet article à la Conférence internationale des femmes pour la paix, qui eut lieu avant Nairobi à Halifax, en Nouvelle-Écosse, du 5 au 9 juin. Elle décrit l'impact de la guerre d'intervention américaine sur le peuple du Nicaragua – et les répercussions de cette agression militaire envers les femmes: le viol, les enlèvements, la torture et la mort, ainsi que l'interruption de leurs rôles traditionnels dans la famille. En raison du contexte révolutionnaire dans son pays, la sécurité signifie la libération d'une nation toute entière. La libération des femmes est, dans cette perspective, une partie importante de la lutte globale pour la liberté.*

This Conference is taking place at a difficult moment for all of humanity, a time when world tension, social convulsion, and external interference (prevalent in almost all the continents) threaten the present and future generations with the scourge of war, and place these generations before a future in which suffering and hardship will dominate. Although it is not easy to admit it, the equality between large and small nations proclaimed by the Charter of the United Nations is now facing the gravest crisis of the last decades. The very essence of international treaties and agreements is now threatened by an imperialist policy



Peinture de BIDO

Credit: General Federation of Iraqi Women

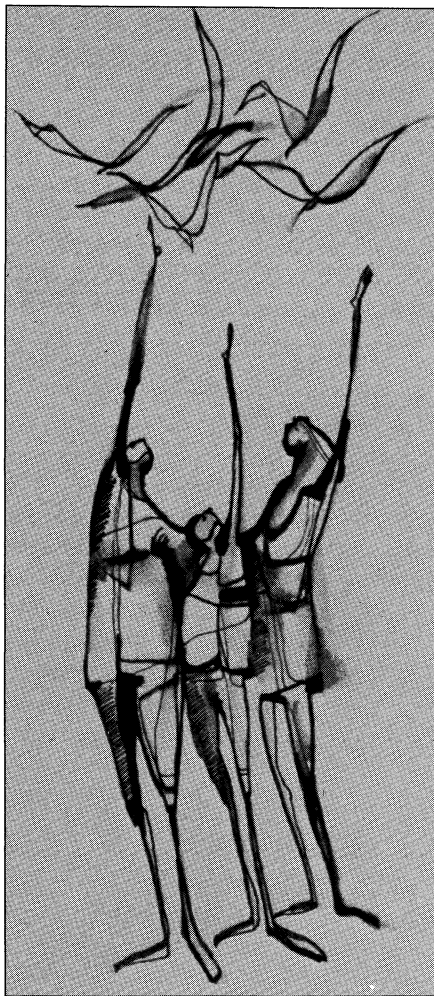
exercising its hegemony over weaker nations, and seeking to overturn both social progress and national development – designed to benefit the masses who for centuries have been marginalized. This is the case of Nicaragua.

Our concept of security is conditioned by this current world context. As a result, in my opinion, the concept of security does not possess the same meaning for all people, nor does it mean the same in all places of the world. On the contrary, a Swiss or North American woman will have a different perspective than a Nicaraguan woman, who confronts death, destruction and war on a daily basis. Tonight I would like to share with

you some thoughts on our situation, and invite you to imagine how you would feel in our circumstances.

For several years now Nicaragua has been the target of economic, political and military aggression by the most powerful military nation on earth. This official policy of the current U.S. administration has to date cost our people the lives of more than 7,000 Nicaraguans, and material damage of some \$386 million. This is the cost in purely quantitative terms, without taking into account the cruel repercussions of the economic boycott decreed against our country last May 1.

These actions have had a profound re-



Credit: Social Development Issues

percussion on women in Nicaragua, since not only do they distort our traditional role within society at large, and with our families, but also prevent us from achieving greater improvements as women, and from strengthening our integration in a process of socio-economic development. These were rights gained by Nicaraguan women through their participation in our people's struggle for liberation.

At the present moment Nicaraguan women live with, and suffer, a war of intervention, running terrible risks; as a result, thousands of women have been kidnapped, raped, tortured and "disappeared" at the hands of the mercenaries funded by the Reagan administration. Also in our specific role as mothers we have been affected, both through the separation of our children who have gone to the war fronts, and because we have also had to be mobilized to the mountains, leaving our children to be cared for by family members or neighbours; as wives and as compañeras, partners, we have suffered,

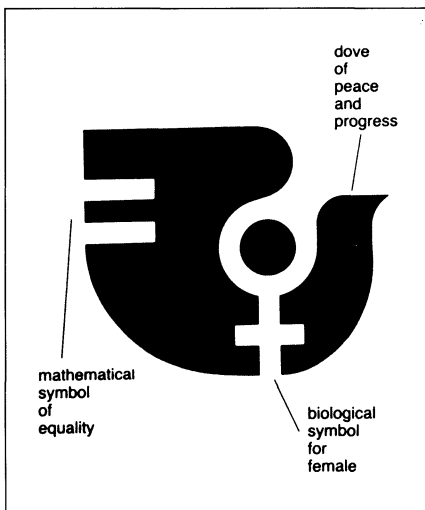
since the war has inevitably affected our home life. In short, we feel vividly the profound changes experienced in our lives: war, torture, death, and the kidnapping of our children are the daily fear for thousands of Nicaraguan mothers.

Because of this huge price, this sacrifice, we Nicaraguan women know that our security, when faced by external aggression and by war, is not a gift that will come from outside, and is not something which one day they will hand over to us.

Women in Nicaragua fought shoulder-to-shoulder with other revolutionaries against the oppression of Somoza's dictatorship, and today they participate in just the same way as we seek the development of our Sandinista revolution. Together we are seeking to construct a new society, assuming the different tasks of the revolution, and even defending the sovereignty of our country with arms in our hands.

We are therefore fully aware that security and peace in our present context have to be won day by day, through hard work and through the struggle of all our people. For us the term "security" does not represent different alternatives for men and women: we do not believe that one can talk, as if in a vacuum, of "women's liberation" without viewing it in global terms, as the liberation of an entire nation.

This is our reality, our philosophy, and our experience – the result of our revolutionary context. This is why comandante Tomás Borge Martínez has noted: "First it was necessary to make a revolution with all the people, so that then the possibility of a women's revolution could result;



Official symbol of the UN Decade for Women  
Credit: Valerie Pettis

it was essential to liberate all our society, so that women's liberation could be started . . ."

And so, the gloomy panorama of the current world situation makes us understand only too well the "urgency for a true form of security." As a result, the alternative of Nicaraguan women to achieve a negotiated peace solution is to show our opponents the firmness of our struggle; that in Nicaragua there is a nation of women and men, old people and children, an entire nation which, in the immortal words of our poet Rubén Darío in his "Ode to Roosevelt," "lives by light, fire, perfume and love;" that we are a nation which, putting in practice the thought of Sandino, "will head toward the sun of liberty, or toward death," because we refuse to accept a cowardly peace, or a false security.

All of this I bring to you, as a Nicaraguan woman, and place before this forum, which constitutes a moment for reflection, respect for commitments, the pursuit of political solutions to acute international problems. It is clearly the time, in our Central American context, to support fully peace initiatives like the Contadora one. We cannot allow humanity to be hurled towards extermination; we simply refuse to accept that we be told our only alternative is war and death. Despite the continued aggression against our country, we Nicaraguans insist on dialogue and on negotiation as a means of resolving difficulties. We want peace desperately, and we will struggle increasingly until we achieve it.

To conclude, dear compañeras of similar concerns and ideals, the sisterly greetings of women in Nicaragua, who appreciate this Conference being inaugurated today, and any future spinoffs from our meetings. We all see it as an important contribution to the necessary struggle for the establishment and consolidation of peace.

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