



CAPACITAR—Women Planting One Heart

An International Project of Empowerment and Solidarity

CAPACITAR in China—Looking at the World through Women's Eyes

CAPACITAR is a local and international network of women bringing each other to life. Our logo comes from a pre-Columbian design of aquatic flowers of ancient Mexico. For us it symbolizes the creativity and empowerment of women—

women coming to life, rooted to the earth, birthing new life, joining together, empowering each other.

CAPACITAR shares techniques of healing, team building and self-development with women leaders to encourage physical and spiritual transformation.

We act so that all women involved are empowered to take control of their lives, inspire communities, and struggle for liberation and peace in the world.

CAPACITAR connects women through an international network of solidarity, building relationships of cultural and personal understanding.

Our name, CAPACITAR, is a Spanish word meaning to empower, to encourage, to bring forth.

We join with the earth and with each other, with our ancestors and with all beings of the future, to bring new life to the land, to recreate the human community, to provide justice and peace, to remember our children, to remember who we are...

We join together as many and diverse expressions of one loving mystery, for the healing of the earth and the renewal of all life...

"Can you imagine the electricity that would zing through the air wherever 35,000 of the world's most dynamic women gathered together?" Judy Ress' question begins our description of the journey we shared with so many others who joined together in China, "many and diverse expressions of the one Loving Mystery, for the healing of the Earth and the renewal of all life." What an amazing experience of living out the U.N. Prayer of the Sabbath.

Carol Bialock, with her diary of the NGO Forum days, gives a personal guided tour through the crowded walkways of the Forum site in Huairou, a once small village set along the edge of a lovely reservoir about an hour's bus ride north of Beijing.

Joan Lohman, co-director of the Capacitar China trip, shares memories of women who found their way to the last tent in the Forum site—the Healing Tent—our Capacitar "home" in Huairou. "The intention of the Healing Tent," Joan tells us, "was carried and supported by every woman of the Capacitar delegation, every woman from the Chinese Medical Associations, each woman who taught or attended a workshop."

One of these women, Joan Seybold, invites us to share the day she danced with the women of the world, entering a circle of our sisters which stretched around the world, linking us all to the energies of the NGO Forum in Huairou.

The story of a journey within the journey is told by Meg Randolph who accompanied union leader Carmen Garcia along a path which led from the Adam's Chicklet factory in Guatemala, to Carmen's own heart and the source of her healing strength.

Capacitar had been asked by NGO Forum Directors to coordinate the Healing Tent with women doctors from the Chinese Medical and Traditional Medical Associations; so ours was a unique experience—women from China, Latin America and the United States learning to work together in three languages, appreciating each others' cultures, recognizing our common goals of healing ourselves, our communities, our Earth.

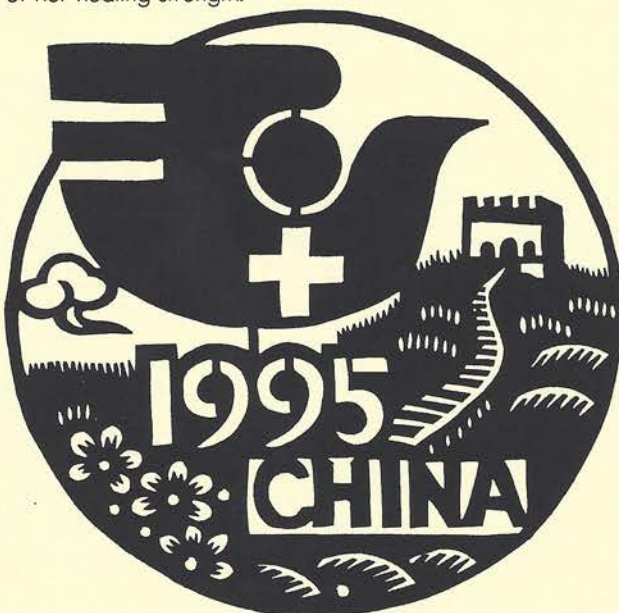
After the NGO Forum, five of us joined the Franciscans International Delegation at the U. N. Conference which met in Beijing September 4-15. The Conference overlapped the Forum so that NGOs could lobby their governments' delegations on specific points in the proposed Platform for Action which U.N. member nations debated, amended and passed. We were able to watch as well as participate in the workings of the U.N. Conference through caucuses set up to pressure delegates to take into account the needs and aspirations of poor or marginalized women and children.

The resulting Platform for Action, while weak in parts, nevertheless is a major step forward. With this document, the term "feminization of poverty" has become mainline. The poor now have a face, and it is the face of millions of impoverished women and children. Moreover, with this document, we have a "magna carta" for women's rights, which are now seen as essential human rights. The challenge, of course, will be the long hard work of transforming the Platform into reality in every corner of the globe.

This transforming work is part of a process that reaches back farther than any of us remembers, but was recognized world-wide at the First World Conference held twenty years ago in Mexico City. About 300 non governmental organizations, and 3,000 women participated in that first event which focused on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. The numbers swelled and the determination grew in Nairobi, ten years later. This year in Huairou-Beijing, over 3,000 nongovernmental organizations and more than 35,000 women pledged to continue the process with their sisters who prepared the way and supported each one's journey to China. In 1995 the focus shifted to addressing all aspects of life from the perspective of women. "Women" is not just one of a long list of significant topics to be tackled. Rather there is now a gender view on everything from economics and governance to health and education.

Yes, it is time to "look at the world through women's eyes!"

Mary Litell osf





Something is Happening Here

by Judy Ress

Can you imagine the electricity that would zing through the air wherever 35,000 of the world's most dynamic women gathered together? The creativity, the energy, the sense of SOMETHING IS HAPPENING HERE was palatable at every tent, during every workshop, with every passing day of the NGO Forum. Everyone was committed to sharing ideas and to listening and learning about what other women were doing to bring about change so that they, in turn, could take some of those ideas back home and try them out.

All in all, more than 4,000 workshops were scheduled and many others were put together on the spot. Topics covered everything from how to set up your own hairdressing business to how to transform recycled materials; from how to get on e-mail to the situation of women political prisoners in South Africa; from genital mutilation in Africa to female infanticide in rural China; from Islamic feminism to older women's health issues; from the role of alternative medicine to healing through chant.

Since my particular interest concerns feminist theology and spirituality, I went to workshops with titles such as: "Rainbow Ritual for Unity"; "Women's Spirituality and the Environment: Old Turtle and All Little Things"; "Women's Lives: The Common Thread within Religious Fundamentalisms"; "The Healing of Womanhood through Body Joy"; "Women and Religion throughout the Ages"; "Weaving the Connections: Women, the Earth and the World's Religions."

Four of us from Capacitar offered a workshop on "Ecofeminism: A Reflection, Dialog and Ritual" which was well attended and much appreciated. Also, some of us from Maryknoll and from Capacitar helped Loretto Sister Maureen McCormack organize a "Roundtable on Women's Spirituality"

where participants shared their spiritual journeys and where they find themselves today in terms of images of the Sacred in their lives.

There were also plenary sessions reporting on the state of women's rights in every region of the world as well as sessions analyzing the global forces now shaping our lives. Some of these included: the effects of militarization, violence, poverty, the technological revolution, the rise of conservatism and the communications boom.

There were sing-alongs, street dances, fiestas, rituals, belly-dancing and prayer circles; even a procession in honor of the Virgin Mary on her birthday (September 8); marches and protests for every cause that hurts us and called us forth to action. There were training sessions for fund raising, drumming and chanting lessons, videos galore, peace banners strung together a mile long, a women's bookstore. It was indeed a celebration of "Looking at the World through Women's Eyes," the event's leitmotif.

It was impossible not to get swept up into the exuberance of it all, this largest-ever gathering of the planet's women. The collective dreams and yearnings as well as the anger and the determination swirling around me seeped deep into my bones and I came away with the conviction that it is now our turn to shape a better world. There was general agreement that the masculine model of doing things simply isn't working and a sense that we women can offer alternatives based on our experience of giving life. We no longer want to limit our power to bear and nurture life to physical motherhood; we want to gestate and bring to birth nothing less than a new culture for the twenty-first century. A culture based on the essential values rooted in the human heart: love mutual respect, honesty, trustworthiness, tolerance, compassion, solidarity and service. As one African woman who is a member of the Greenbelt Movement in Kenya put it: "I believe that we are really on the edge of a transformation in consciousness. I feel it within me. Can't you feel it too, sisters?"

The sights and sounds of China and this remarkable gathering of women will remain with us for a long, long while. The sharing, laughing and dancing are now woven tightly into our own Capacitar spirit, enabling us to live and work in a larger vision so that women's gifts may be freed for the healing of our peoples and of our Earth.

The Women In Black led a powerful, silent protest in Huairou, one of the most eloquent statements against violence at the Women's Forum.



East Meets West

by Pat Cane and Mary Litell osf



"As a child I learned Tai Chi but then stopped doing it. Seeing how important Tai Chi is for you and many Western women, I want to start practicing again." Dr. Gao Wei Hua, pharmacologist at the Beijing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, reflected on our mutual experience in the Healing Tent.

In negotiating the Healing Tent program with Dr. Gao, Dr. Han Xiaoming, Deputy Secretary General of the Chinese Medical Association, and Dr. Hu, President of the Chinese Traditional Medical Association, we had long interchanges about the meaning of "healing" and the effects of such simple activities as dance, movement and song on promoting wholeness. As we explained the "new thought" on body-mind-spirit unity, the doctors struggled to translate and understand our ideas, until we realized that the Chinese had not suffered from the Western philosophical split. We described the movement of "ecofeminist spirituality" that is awakening in many places, encouraging women to reclaim their inner wisdom; and we learned that few Chinese women had had the opportunity to develop "spirituality" in their personal lives. In their healing practice the Chinese doctors tend to emphasize an integration of medical treatment with diet, lifestyle and Tai Chi. We emphasize an integration of personal healing and the healing of society.

We learned much as we collaborated, listened to each other and opened our selves as women and as friends. After a feminist ritual to inaugurate the Healing Tent, Dr. Han said, "I've never done anything like this, and I like it!" Dr. Hu delighted in teaching us a lively healing dance, the Yang Kor, which Chinese people often do together after a day of work. And everyone laughed as we all sang and danced our traditional "Hokey Pokey."

We Western members of the Healing Tent team learned how to apologize; not in the American sense of asking for forgiveness or taking the responsibility for wrongdoing, but in an oriental sense of showing respect for another's experience. At our first meeting the Chinese doctors apologized for not being familiar with the concept of spiritual and emotional healing. We apologized for not being medical experts on the scale of our Chinese counterparts.

Later on, our new friends who were living in very poor accommodations in Huairou while they participated in the Forum and work of the Healing Tent, apologized for any inconveniences we were experiencing with housing and transportation in their country. And we in turn apologized for the critical and negative news reports that were circulating in the Western media. This coverage did not tell the whole story about the kindness and extraordinary networking between women at the Forum. Nor did it begin to describe the great patience, warmth and friendship of the people of China whom we met everyday in the housing areas, on street corners, buses and so on.

Our countries may have many political and economic differences, but on personal and professional levels, East met West in the Healing Tent and as women we grew in such friendship and mutual appreciation that Dr. Han Xiaoming could write: "We, as Chinese and Westerners, have different cultures, but we also have many things in common. Time passed so quickly that we couldn't exchange ourselves enough. I believe that we will continue our friendship and exchange our thoughts." She concluded her letter by expressing our own hopes and feelings, "Sometime we may meet each other again! I will miss you and Mary, and Joan and all the others."

Oh, yes, we are missing you, Han Xiaoming, and all the other wonderful women with whom we worked, and laughed and hoped.



China Diary by Carol Bialock RSCJ

August 30 As we made our way into the Beijing Olympic Stadium, excitement at seeing women from all over the world in their native costumes came to a peak with Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" which burst forth as a huge blimp hovered overhead with the words "Equality, Development and Peace"—the theme of the Conference. In the most moving speech of the opening, Helvi Sipilä, Secretary General of the first Women's Conference in Mexico, 1975, said that women have never really united world-wide for peace, and the day we do that, peace will come.

August 31 Back at the meeting site in Huairou there were tents for each continent, a healing tent, a global tent, peace tent, quiet tent, older women's tent, disabled persons' tent, lesbians' tent indigenous tent, chapels, a market place, "Once and Future Pavilion" with science and technology displays, meeting tents and innumerable classrooms, etc., etc., etc. I had lunch with my order, the Religious of the Sacred Heart, which was like a mini-U.N., from China, Taiwan, India, Scotland, Spain, Korea, Japan, Canada, Uganda, Italy and the U.S.A. Then, in the afternoon, the Healing Tent officially opened.

September 1 There were many, many choices! Thousands of workshops plus plenaries in a civic auditorium. This morning I chose the plenary on Women in Government where Cheryl Carolus, a South African parliament member stole the show. That day I lunched with two women from Australia and dined with two more from Afghanistan. In the afternoon I led a workshop on women's songs. This was the day the heavens opened and something close to monsoon rain fell. I will always be grateful to the Chinese Friendship Store that gave me a raincape!

September 2 I spent most of the day in the Healing Tent learning some Rosen bodywork and learning from the Chinese doctors (women of course) some foot reflexology and a dance that makes people happy and thus preserves their health. I had supper with a woman who started the breastfeeding revival 39 years ago.

September 3 In today's plenary on Media, Culture and Communication, Judy Rebick of CBS, Canada showed how news is constructed so as not to include women and children. Sally Field, an American actress spoke about "Save the Children" and a trip to Nepal that opened her eyes to the plight of the world's women. Yayori Matsui, a Japanese journalist has done exposures of Japanese men's sex exploitation of Thai women and of the U.S.'s use of chemicals in Viet Nam. In the afternoon I went with one of our sisters who teaches theology in the seminary of the Patriotic Catholic church in Beijing to visit two churches and a convent of fifty sisters.

September 4 Outstanding plenary on the rise of Fundamentalism. Riffat Hassan, a Pakistani Muslim woman teaching theology at the University of Louisville, who has devoted years to studying the origin of oppressive Muslim laws, has learned that they came from the **Hadith** (collection of sayings) and not the **Koran** which should be the true foundation of Islamic Law. Her presentation was masterful. A second plenary, "The Obstacles to Peace," included the testimonies of Russian mothers who went right to the scene of battles to bring their captured sons home, and a woman of Northern Ireland who exposed British violation of human rights.

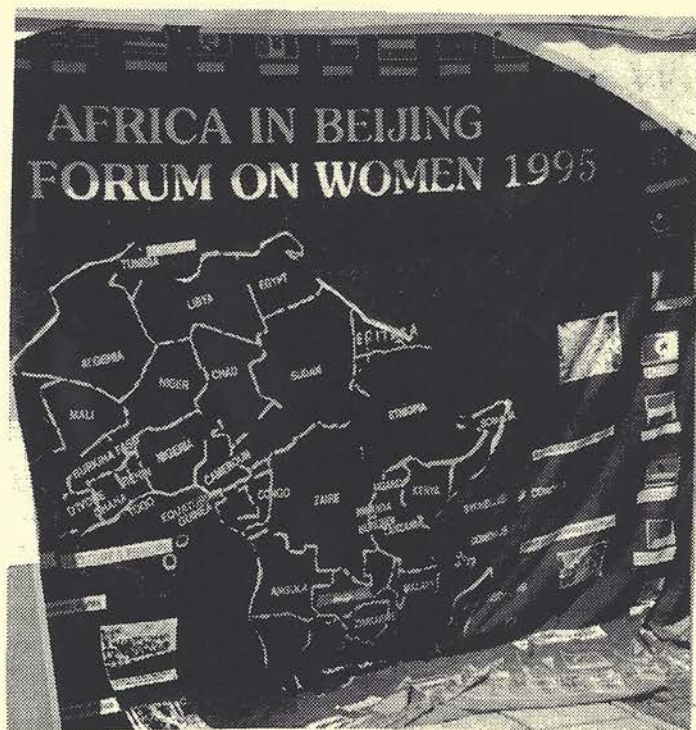
September 5 In an international forum on women's spirituality, Isabel Ascensio from El Salvador spoke of her search, beyond the usual patriarchal concepts, for a theology/spirituality that expresses woman's soul. Victoria Martinez of Chile, shared how she has



us that there are young feminists . . . "Let Us in, train us, use our enthusiasm, bring a young woman to your sharings." Paulina Tangiora of the indigenous network said that there was no generation gap among her people because community is so strong among the Maori. Helvi Sipila again stood out. She told us that thirty-five women meeting in Geneva brought about the First World Conference on Women and made 1975 International Women's Year. The closing this afternoon was heavy with both rain and gratitude.

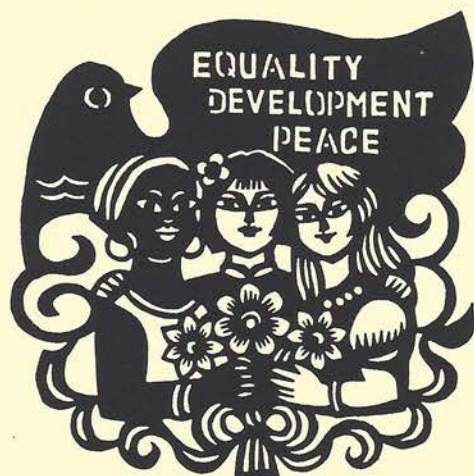
I feel I have barely hinted at the wonders of being there. I'm happy to report that some men participated, their presence was a constant reminder that PARTNERSHIP is the real goal . . . We were surrounded by courteous high school and college students who served as translators and guides . . . demonstrators would suddenly come on stage during plenaries with huge posters, or block traffic for a few minutes as they wound their way through bicycles and walkers . . . translators into six languages were kept busy at plenaries . . . there was daycare for children, the youngest evidently being a two year old Ugandan girlchild . . .

Last but not least, YOU can be at the Fifth World Conference on Women if you really want to be. It just takes determination, ingenuity and generous supporters! Thank You !!!!!



"Gracias! Thanks for this experience so profound and universal. I am a neighbor of this world for a while, and today it happens that you are here too ...so many centuries, so many worlds, so many spaces, all coinciding here . . ."

Hermana Rebecca Cervantes
Secretary General, CONFREGUA
National Federation of
Religious of Guatemala



The Healing Tent

by Joan Lohman

I never learned her name. She wore a pale yellow sari and a red dot symbolizing marriage on her brow. Under my hands, her shoulders were tight, proud, held together. As we completed our circle of Rosen touch, I invited each woman to share her feelings. "May I tell you how I am feeling?" She was the last person to speak. "I feel like a baby who has never been touched, and you are my mother. You have touched me as I have always wanted to be touched. I want to stay all day, and I want to come back tomorrow." The moment she spoke, I knew why I had come to China. I knew why we had created the Healing Tent.

Until we arrived in China, this tent existed only in our minds and on FAXES. It became a reality on the steamy first day of the Forum when a group of us located our pale blue home with its lace curtains and cement floor, tucked in a far corner of the Forum site near the Quiet Tent and the Grassroots Tent. From the moment we hung our beautiful CAPACITAR banner, through our opening ritual, through the day the Chinese women doctors joined us, the Healing Tent became a multi-level home to body and spirit, a respite, a space for women to connect nonverbally.

I will always remember the opening ritual, with rain pouring outside our thin walls, the beat of the drum, and Jeanette, Bridget, Judy and Mary calling in the Four Directions. Over fifty women from around the world crowded into the tent. We danced our intention to create a space for healing for all women. Pat Cane spoke about CAPACITAR's joy in being asked to co-facilitate the tent and Dr. Han Xiaoming, Secretary General of the Chinese Medical Association, echoed her delight at working with us. As we formed a circle to begin a group shoulder massage, Pat and I looked at beautiful faces from so many lands and smiled, knowing that our efforts to bring the CAPACITAR team of 25 women to China, were worth it.

I will remember the moment the boisterous, exuberant Chinese doctors' delegation arrived. I was teaching a quiet class in Rosen touch when suddenly, 15 women with their herbs and healing apparatus burst into the tent. My deepest experience in healing began. What happens when two cultures and two styles of healing meet in a small space? I left the tent to collect myself. "Perhaps," advised a wise friend, "healing is not about creating a quiet space, but about learning to communicate and work with the Chinese women." Later, watching my Chinese sisters begin a graceful class in Tai Chi and then move into a joyful round of stylized Chinese dancing called Yang Kor, I knew my friend was right.

I will remember visitors pouring into the tent and being called into the quiet of an atmosphere created by Anabel Torres from Nicaragua and Victoria Martinez from Chile who were beautifully co-teaching a workshop in polarity massage.

I will remember massaging the massive shoulders of Lamodima, of the Manual Trades Workers of Botswana, while she talked of union organizing in Africa, and a video camera filmed her wonderfully coiled braids with my white hands on her chocolate skin.

I will remember how Carol Bialock, with her contagious love of singing and her flowing blue and green mumu, captivated the heart of a woman from Chinese TV, who then returned to interview our colorful sixty-six year old "elder sister."

I will remember the early morning hush as Pat softly guided a new group of women through a basic CAPACITAR training; the raucous afternoon Yang Kor dancing of Chinese, Latin and North American women that became a sensuous Cuban movement in a moment of spontaneous multiculturalism; the early evening hush as Isabel Ascencio from El Salvador led a circle of women from many lands in the flowing movements of Tai Chi Chih, or Bridget Cooke from Oregon and Chile led graceful Shi Ba Shi. In silence, laughter, touch and movement, we evoked the spirit of CAPACITAR, the spirit of healing.



Left: Members of the CAPACITAR team with doctors from the Chinese Traditional Medical Association celebrated together at the close of their collaboration in the Healing Tent. Right: Women from around the world share a healing massage during a CAPACITAR workshop.

A Healing Journey by Meg Randolph

As I entered the Healing Tent I saw Guatemalan union leader, Carmen Garcia, giving massage after massage to women from many countries, who came to pass moments or hours in the tent to fulfill a need for reflection, for energy, for spirituality and community. This was a momentous occasion for Carmen and me, because less than a year ago we began a journey of healing together.

I had a day to myself in Guatemala last November while waiting for the CAPACITAR women's group to arrive. I met Carmen that day, and as a physical therapist accustomed to asking difficult questions, I asked her why she wore a brown cloth bag over her hand. I looked at her hand and touched her hand, only to learn months later that I was one of very few people to have done so until that time. That same evening I learned about the partial amputation of Carmen's hand and her fifteen subsequent surgeries.

Later on in the Women's Journey, Carmen had a Rosen bodywork session with Joan Lohman, a massage therapist in our group. In translating for Carmen, I learned about Rosen therapy. Joan and I both did other types of massage with Carmen, as did Pat Cane on later visits to Guatemala.

Over the several months between that Women's Journey and the China trip, Carmen did much inner work and began to unglove her hand for friends and co-workers. She participated in a massage workshop with Pat and began to accept and love her hand, using it for healing others. So, when she arrived in Atlanta (en route to China) for a medical evaluation, her hand had changed. It was no longer swollen with a boxing glove appearance. But it had more sensation and was functional.

The doctor's orders were simple: remove the cloth bag and use the hand! Notions of plastic surgery or further amputation and a prosthesis were dismissed. With the help of occupational and physical therapists, Carmen was able to get some protective devices for her hand so that on her return to Guatemala she would be able to fulfill her goals of cooking and cleaning, of returning to the factory to earn a living for her family.

Now, in China, tears of happiness filled my eyes as I witnessed Carmen, near the end of her own healing journey, tirelessly giving so much of herself, using both of her hands to massage the neck and shoulders of women from around the world. I realized that Carmen's healing journey is also a CAPACITAR healing journey shared by many who can tell and re-tell the story.



The Day that I Danced with the Women of the World by Joan Seybold

It began with a workshop in the Healing Tent that, like so many other things at the Forum I hadn't planned on attending. The women of the Chinese Medical Associations led forty of us in traditional Tai Chi, which we followed with varying degrees of confidence. Next we all learned Yang Kor, a traditional four-step dance of the Chinese people. I was told that people gather in parks to dance together for exercise, camaraderie and fun. And it was fun—the simple steps and playful rhythm invite everyone to participate.

Next, I hurried across the Forum "campus" to a workshop led by a Canadian dancer who teaches African-inspired World Dance. The movements of the dance—knees bent, hips and pelvis loose, feet stomping, arms free and easy—began small and simple and gradually built, until the room was alive with kinetic energy. Oh how beautiful it was to look around and see women of all shades and sizes swaying and smiling, clapping to the drum beat! Roberta Meilleure introduced each new movement by honoring its roots. She demonstrated a hip circle and asked if any of us had that movement in our traditional dance. A woman from Polynesia raised her hand and was invited to the stage to demonstrate, as everyone cheered. Many more women took turns offering their own traditional steps, claiming the creative energy of their roots. The group then repeated the movements together, amplifying their power.

The third workshop I attended that day, "Eco-feminism: a Reflection, Dialog and Ritual", was presented by Capacitar members Judy Ress and Bridget Cooke from the U.S. and Chile, and Jeanette Gaudet and Mary Litell from the U.S. and Italy. A four-cornered altar was laid in the center of the room and set with candles, incense, bowls of water and earth, and a basket of seeds. Each woman in turn told a story of her personal spiritual journey and of the way that it led to an understanding of eco-feminism—a deep body-planet-spirit connection. Each explained how the idea that we are all integral parts of a web of life, dependent upon the planet and each other, and thus intrinsically valuable and responsible, led her to a commitment to social and ecological justice. To ritualize this understanding, each of the four leaders used a symbol from the altar to focus the meditation on the elements. The seed symbolized each of us. "The seed needs air, and the seed needs fire, and the seed needs earth, and the seed needs water" we chanted. To end the ritual we circled the altar in a dance which symbolized that we are nurtured by the earth, we nurture each other, and we nurture the planet—an unbroken circle.

It was then that my experience of the day coalesced. It occurred to me that my love of dance and expression is based on the belief in my connection to the body-spirit-planet; and from that belief comes my sense of empowerment. As I honor my need to express that connection between my body, the body of the mother planet, and the bodies of my sisters across the globe through movement, my dance becomes an ongoing prayer for the strengthening of that connection. To end the day I led a small group in the Healing Tent in Tai Chi Chih. The simple, meditative movements relaxed and soothed us, gently easing to a close, a very powerful day. That evening I realized that I had come full circle. I had learned the dances of my sisters, and shared the dancing of my heart.





What Next?

• The NGO Forum and the Fourth World Conference on Women were such large events with such an inclusive agenda, that it is quite impossible for any one person, organization or newsletter to tell "the story". For this reason, it is helpful to read different articles and newsletters telling of some aspects of this event, and to participate in a variety of the report-back activities that you hear about in your area.

• Since monitoring the implementation of the Platform for Action is one of the top priorities of the NGOs, it also crucial to know the content of this Platform in order to be aware of your own nation's implementation of these agreements. A summarized version of the Platform for Action prepared by Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) can be found on-line at <enb@igc.apc.org> or on the gopher, at <gopher.igc.apc.org> and in searchable hypertext, through the Linkages WWW-server at <<http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/>> on the Internet. ENB did a magnificent job in summarizing each day's activities at the Conference in a daily one-pager that became the most sought-after hand-out each morning.

• For a print copy of the final Earth Negotiations Bulletin containing: Brief History of the FWCW, Report of the FWCW, (summaries of) Commitments Made by Countries, Beijing Declaration, Platform for Action. . . Things to look for After Beijing, please contact the group responsible for ENB—International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), 161 Portage Avenue East, 6th Floor, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 0Y4, CANADA, Tel: 1-204-958-7791, FAX: 1-204-958-7710. This special volume of the ENB is also uploaded into the APC conferences <enb.library> and <women.news>.



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We welcome you to become part of our CAPACITAR network.

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