Wenzao Han: Registration Going "Reasonably Well" In Jiangsu 95.5.1

Jiangsu RAB Official Talks About Church Registration 95.5.2

Women's Persistence Builds Up Guangxi Church 95.5.3

High Priority To Lay Training In Yunnan Minority Churches 95.5.4

Mass Lay Training Class Held In Nujiang Region 95.5.5

Christian Majority Changes Yunnan County 95.5.6

Pastoral Visits Helpful For Remote Churches 95.5.7

Crackdown On Rural Sects Announced In Anhui 95.5.8

Free Tea In Summer: Hubei Christians' Innovative Evangelism 95.5.9

Kuo Siu-may, Wife Of Bishop Ting, Dies 95.5.10

Chinese Christian Women Hold Workshop At NGO Forum On Women 95.5.11

News In Brief 95.5.12

ANS Documentation: A Letter From The China Christian Council 95.5.13

ANS Feature: "Don't Deconstruct, Just Create!" Women Discover Their Power 95.5.14
Wenzao Han: Registration Going "Reasonably Well" In Jiangsu

The registration of churches and meeting points has been going "reasonably well" in Jiangsu Province, according to the acting general secretary of the CCC, Dr. Wenzao Han. Talking to ANS from Nanjing, Dr. Han said that relatively few problems had been encountered in the process so far.

Han said that before registration there had been large numbers of unapproved meeting points in the province. These were now being registered along with the previously approved meeting points, in most cases without problems. Accordingly, Han expected the number of registered meeting points in the province to be "70-90% higher" than previously.

Citing the registration process in Huai'an City in northern Jiangsu as an example, Han said that there had previously been 61 approved and 54 unapproved churches and meeting points. Of these, 90 had now received registration and seven temporary registration. Of the remaining 18 meeting points, one had refused to apply, while two heretical sects had been denied registration. The remaining 15 meeting points had been merged with other meeting points close by due to a lack of qualified leadership, after a series of consultation meetings among them.

Commenting on the fact that the government, and not the Christian Council or Three-Self Movement, decided who was a qualified leader, Han said that this was necessary because membership in the Christian Council and Three-Self Movement had nothing to do with registration. "There are a few groups which would rather trust the government than the Christian Council," Han quipped. If local RABs felt that a congregation did not have a qualified leader, it usually asked the local Christian Council to help organize training courses for the lay persons recommended by this congregation, even if it did not normally cooperate with the Christian Council. After such training, the congregation was deemed to have a qualified leadership and could be registered.

When asked about problems with registration, Han said the main difficulty had been that in some places congregations had been forced to pay high registration fees. Han reported that the Jiangsu People's Political Consultative Conference had organized a team of six Christian leaders for an inspection tour this summer to follow up reports on excessive fees. After negotiations with the Jiangsu government, maximum fees had now been set at 200 RMB in northern Jiangsu and 300 RMB in the richer southern part. The Jiangsu Religious Affairs Bureau had given a public assurance that congregations which had been charged more than the permitted fees would be refunded.

Han admitted that originally, the CCC had hoped that registration would be free of charge, but that this seemed to be impossible. "These fees have become necessary because local Religious Affairs Bureaus (RABs) work on very limited budgets and simply don't have the funds to deal with registration, which was ordered by the central government." According to Han, many [OVER]
Registration Going "Reasonably Well".../2

RABs had been forced to hire temporary staff to process registration applications. The inability of a congregation to come up with the registration fee would not be a hindrance for registration, though. Han said that the Jiangsu government had earmarked funds amounting to 200,000 RMB to waive or reduce fees for poor churches.

As for the registration process in other provinces, Han said that the CCC was monitoring the situation closely, but that it was too early to have an overall picture. So far, though, the CCC had not received large numbers of complaints regarding the registration process. The main problem seemed to be excessive fees in some places, and these cases had been referred to the RAB at the State Council level.

Han reiterated that all congregations that qualified for registration should be allowed to register, and said that the CCC had asked provincial Christian Councils to speak up for all congregations that had been denied registration even though they qualified according to the national regulations. [ANS]

Jiangsu RAB Official Talks About Church Registration

Since the registration of places of religious worship started in some areas of Jiangsu Province in October of 1994, a number of problems have had to be solved. Difficulties, like the distinction between approval and registration, the question of qualification of local church leaders or a local church's connection with the Three-Self Movement, and the problem of lingering denominationalism and its relationship to registration, are discussed in an article by a Jiangsu Religious Affairs Bureau official which was first published in the magazine Zongjiao (Religion) and later reprinted in the September issue of the church magazine, Tian Feng.

The official, Sha Guangyi, writes that registration first started in five selected counties and cities in Jiangsu Province. Experience in these places showed that problems occurred mainly where officials or local church members did not clearly understand the rules of the registration process.

Sha writes that, in years past, churches and meeting points in Jiangsu Province had to be approved by the government, a process inherently different from the current registration. The former approvals had been given on the basis of Document No.6, which, as a party document, set out the policy on how to deal with religious bodies. This document had now been superseded by the "Regulation Governing Venues For Religious Activities" which defined a legal framework for registration.

According to Sha, there were 1,452 approved churches and meeting points and 1,244 unapproved private home meetings in Jiangsu before registration started. Both the approved and [OVER]
Jiangsu RAB Official Talks About Church Registration...

the unapproved meeting points would now have to register, and all formerly unapproved meeting points would be registered if they fulfilled the six criteria for registration. (see ANS 94.2/3)

A second problem area mentioned by Sha is the relation between registration and the "rational arrangement" for places of worship. While registration should not be used as a pretext to close down worship venues, there were cases where the RABs, in their regular work, should ensure such "rationalization". Sha cites the example of Shaji Village in Weining County, which had five home meeting points, two of them approved, before registration started. When all five meeting points applied for registration, the County RAB brought their leaders together for a study session that lasted several days. At the end, two meeting points were merged with two others, leaving three registered meeting points in the village.

A second case of rationalization cited is that of the congregation in Yue village, not far from Huai’an. The 18 believers there had to travel 6 kilometers to neighboring Yaozhuang Village to attend worship. They had applied for approval of their own meeting point, but this had been denied. During the registration process, the Yue villagers again applied for their own meeting point. As they are fish farmers with long working hours, the local RAB felt that their long trek to church might negatively influence production and therefore gave the Yue villagers temporary registration for their own meeting point.

Another issue that has been shown to be problematic, according to Sha, is the qualification of local pastoral workers in charge of a registered meeting point. According to the regulations, the person in charge of a meeting point must be qualified according to the rules of his or her religion. Sha says that he felt that most Protestant grassroots lay leaders could not be considered as suitably qualified according to the regulations. To establish qualifications, the RAB in Jiangsu closely followed the Jiangsu Christian Council's regulations for local churches, as well as checking whether local church leaders had the approval of the masses. In some cases, local church leaders were asked to undergo a test devised by pastors from the next city. But Sha insists that the decision on whether a leader was qualified must be made by the government, and not the church. He adds, though, that if a meeting point met all criteria except that for a trained leader, temporary registration should be granted, and the pastoral worker be asked to undergo a series of lay training courses to raise his or her qualifications.

Any congregation can be registered, says Sha, whether it has related to the Three-Self Movement (TSPM) or not. Membership in the TSPM was not a criteria for registration, and should not be made one. Sha gave a number of reasons why congregations did not join the TSPM: In some cases, local Christians disagreed with the leadership style of local TSPM leaders. In other cases, the local TSPM had done nothing to help churches, causing them to lose faith in it. Other congregations were unwilling to be part of any organization above the local level. Some felt the TSPM was [OVER]
Jiangsu RAB Official Talks About Church Registration.../3

not spiritual enough. Finally, Sha says that some groups stayed away from the TSPM at the urging of foreigners involved with them. With the exception of the last group, all could obtain registration if they fulfilled the criteria.

Finally, Sha mentions the problem of re-awakened denominationalism. This has been especially noticeable among groups with a background of Seventh-Day Adventists, the Little Flock and the True Jesus Church. Sha says that there are different ways of solving this issue: Several groups from different traditions could share a building, but have separate meetings. In this case, they had to have a joint management committee, and apply for registration as one group. In other cases, one venue would be used by only one group. In this case, registration could be granted, but not under a denominational name. Such a policy would allow room for different traditions without splitting the unity of the church. [ANS]

ANS 95.5.3

Women's Persistence Builds Up Guangxi Church

Thanks to the persistence of two women, Hou Qutang and Yang Guifeng, the congregation in Liucheng County, Guangxi Province, is finally flourishing in its own church building.

The congregation was started when Hou, who became a Christian in 1982, met Yang at a worship service in nearby Liuzhou City. The two women, one of them a Zhuang, the other a Han Chinese, decided to team up to start a meeting point in their own county town. At the start, this proved to be extremely difficult. Accused of spreading superstition, they got no help. With very little money for a building, the two women finally found a former pigsty which they used as a meeting point. "When there was rain outside, we had rain inside, too, even after the rain outside had stopped," the women recall with a laugh. When the condition of the building deteriorated even further, they renovated it with their own hands. As soon as the local government got wind of this, it demanded a monthly rent of 60 RMB for the building, an amount the small congregation could not afford. It therefore moved to another building, where the rent was only 15 RMB. As the years went by, the congregation grew, and more and more new meeting points were established.

Finally, Christians in Liucheng decided that they needed a proper church building. Again it was Ms. Hou and Ms. Yang who came to the fore. Tirelessly, they raised the necessary funds and spent endless hours in the numerous offices whose approval was needed before the building could even start. "If we couldn't get approval the first time, we went back another time. If this wasn't enough, well, then we went a third time," say the women. The first church ever in Liucheng was finally built, with seats for about 300 people. In addition, there are now more than 20 meeting points serving the almost 3,000 Christians in the county. [ANS]
High Priority To Lay Training In Yunnan Minority Churches

Rural churches in Yunnan place a very high priority on lay training classes, running dozens of different programs every year. This was reported by a team of pastoral visitors to various regions in northern and western Yunnan Province in the October issue of the national church magazine, Tian Feng.

Christians in the Dehong Autonomous Area number in the tens of thousands. Most of them belong to minority ethnic groups like Miao, Jingpo or Lisu. According to the Tian Feng report, the Lisu nationality has the highest percentage of Christians.

Yinjiang County within the Dehong Autonomous Area has about 20,000 Christians worshipping in 121 churches, but only three pastors and 21 evangelists. Since Christians in the area belong to either the Lisu or the Jingpo nationality, lay training classes are held in both languages. Each year, there is a three-month Bible course for about one hundred participants. Besides theological training, courses focus on basic medicine as well as rural development, including topics like pesticide and fertilizer usage or fruit tree cultivation. All courses are held in a local church, with two simple bamboo huts serving as dormitories.

Longchuan County, in the same area, has its own lay training center. Located on a large piece of land atop a high mountain, the center is surrounded by vegetable gardens. The very simple buildings are still partly unfinished, with no glass in the windows. As in Yinjiang, a three-month Bible course is held here every year. This year, it was attended by 79 Lisu and 15 Jingpo Christians. To keep the cost of these training courses as low as possible, participants are required to work in the vegetable gardens to grow their own food, as well as to draw water from the distant well and cut firewood for the cooking fires. Food is extremely simple, with only two meals a day consisting of rice and vegetables cooked in a small amount of oil. Meat is only served once or twice a month. Even so, participation fees for this year amounted to 220 RMB, a sum that many poor churches are unable to raise. Church leaders in Longchuan worry about inflation, which will make the training course even more expensive next year, and fear that fewer and fewer church workers will be able to attend.

In Luquan Autonomous County, most of the 40,000 or so Christians are from the Yi nationality. Some Yi villages are 100% Christian. Training courses for Yi Christians are held at Sayingpan, about 80 kilometers to the north, at a large Yi church. Similarly to the other counties, there is a three-month Bible course, and shorter training courses are held on agricultural topics as well as on church music.

Overall, minority Christians in Yunnan are very poor. While willing to donate what they can, in many cases they are unable to raise enough money to cover the cost of all the needed church work, leaving the congregations weak and vulnerable to cults and heresies. [ANS]
Mass Lay Training Class Held In Nujiang Region

A training class for more than 500 participants was recently held in the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Region in western Yunnan Province. Of the 430,000 inhabitants of this region, at least 100,000 are Christians, but there are only four ordained pastors, of whom two are too old to work. While many young people are willing to attend theological seminary, local congregations lack the money to support them during their studies.

The training course was one of the first ever possible in the region, which has seen dramatic growth in Christianity in recent years. So far, local cadres had often denied permits for training classes, reasoning that training classes amounted to the "promotion of religion", which could not be tolerated. But as the numbers of believers in the region increased, the crime rate decreased, as did drug abuse, a huge problem in this area bordering on the "Golden Triangle". This in turn changed the attitude of the local government, which finally allowed a training course to go ahead.

While most of the participants in the training course came from the Lisu and Nu nationalities, some lay leaders from the Drung (Dulong) and Tibetan nationalities were also present. The latter came from villages that are cut off from the world for seven months, since mountain passes are only open for five months during the summer. [ANS]

Christian Majority Changes Yunnan County

Fugong County in northwestern Yunnan Province has become known as "Christ County" in recent years. With Christians making up almost 90% of the county's population of 70,000, Christianity has permeated all aspects of public and private life.

The high percentage of Christians in the county correlates with an extremely low crime rate, a fact that hasn't escaped the attention of local authorities. Christians from Fugong report that, far from harassing or obstructing Christianity, as happened formerly, the government now actually encourages people to believe. One example given in the report speaks of a man working for a government work unit dismissed from his post for constant drunkenness, who was told by his supervisor only to return after he had become a Christian and changed his life. The man was subsequently baptized, stopped drinking and has been re-employed.

Churches in Fugong are organized in a county Christian council, and have also established a local TSPM committee. There is no ordained pastor in the county, but there are 20 evangelists. As villages are spread out over difficult mountain terrain, many of the evangelists have to walk long hours to reach meeting points where they are to preach. Some local evangelists face regular hikes of up to 40 kilometers a day. [OVER]
Christian Majority Changes Yunnan County.../2

Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving are big festivals in Fugong County. Usually, three or four churches will band together to celebrate, with entire village populations traversing the mountains to the festival site, complete with quilts, cooking pots and several day's worth of food.

Not everything is well, though, in Fugong. Sectarian preachers from outside the county have in recent years created divisions and enmity, and harmed the churches' witness.

Fugong County is inhabited by the Lisu, Nu, and Bai nationalities, with a small number of Han Chinese.[ANS]

Pastoral Visits Helpful For Remote Churches

Regular pastoral visits organized by provincial Christian councils have a very positive impact and can help solve even protracted problems in rural churches, says a church leader from Gansu Province in China's far west. According to Li Jianguo, such visits should be organized at least once a year, so that problems can be recognized and solved before they become too entrenched.

Recalling his experience of the first such pastoral visit to the Hexi region in western Gansu earlier this year, Li said that some cadres there were still under the influence of "red ideas" and tended to suppress religion where they encountered it. In Linze County (Changye Prefecture) for example, local cadres had declared all preaching by evangelists from outside the country as illegal. As there are no trained evangelists at all in the county, Christians there have been cut off from proper Christian teaching and nurture for many years. Li said that the visit by a team of leaders from the Gansu Christian Council had given local cadres a better understanding of the religious policy decreed by law and of the freedoms that Christian churches enjoy.

Li added that such pastoral visits are also helpful in resolving problems within local churches. He cited the example of the church in Yumen City, where a new church building had been erected solely through the efforts of female Christians. Women in the congregation had raised more than 50,000 RMB without outside help, and built the church with their own hands. After its completion, however, tensions within the congregation matured into open conflict, with serious consequences for the life of the church. But after four days of meetings and visits organized by the pastoral visitation team from the Gansu Christian Council, a congregational meeting finally achieved reconciliation and the resolution of the underlying differences.

Li said that such pastoral visits were especially important in areas like Hexi, where churches in a huge, sparsely populated area were served by a small number of full-time pastoral workers. Hexi, with its seven church districts, has only six trained pastoral workers. Li added that churches in the area were asking the Gansu Christian Council to organize lay training classes and assign more trained church workers to the region. [ANS]
Crackdown On Rural Sects Announced In Anhui

A crackdown on rural sects has been announced in Anhui Province. According to a report in the Anhui Daily, party and religious affairs officials conferred in early October to start a campaign against "religious or counterrevolutionary groups which are, under the cloak of Christianity, engaging in unlawful and criminal activities." Among the sectarian groups listed are the "Established King" sect (Beilwag), the "Yellers" sect (Huwan pai), the "Spirit Religion" (Lingling jiao), the "Disciples' Church" (Mentu hui) and the "Full Scope Church" (Quanfanwei jiachui).

According to the report, the crackdown will center on sectarian groups which are seen as threatening social peace and stability, without infringing on the right of citizens to engage in "normal and legal religious activities." The campaign, which is to last for three months, aims at the closure of meeting points set up by these sects, and arrest of their leaders.

According to acting CCC general secretary Dr. Wenzao Han, the CCC is following the situation in Anhui closely. All of the groups affected by the crackdown have been criticized as heretical by the CCC (see ANS 95.3, Focus On Sects And Heresies). The CCC has urged Anhui government authorities not to attack genuine Christian groups during this campaign. [ANS]

Free Tea In Summer: Hubei Christians' Innovative Evangelism

The church in Jianglin County, Hubei Province, has grown from about 500 believers in 1986 to more than 3,000 today. Rapid church growth in the area can partly be attributed to the local Christians' involvement in service for the benefit of their communities. Besides sending volunteers to road improvement projects and raising money for needy families, Christians in one township have developed a particularly innovative way of proclaiming the Gospel.

Bailinghe Township is a small but bustling place, with many fast growing businesses and factories. In the summer of 1993, Christians from the local meeting point started running a daily tea stall at the city center, providing hundreds of cups of tea free of charge to shoppers from the surrounding countryside, school children on their way home, and travelers passing through. Every day, four or five Christians from the congregation work at the tea stall. Besides quenching the physical thirst of passers-by, the Christians have been able to proclaim the Gospel to those stopping at the stall. This has proved easy as many of them ask the Christians about the motivation behind their service to the community. Answer the believers: "Our Lord Jesus has told us to do this." Besides winning new believers for the church, the congregation has also earned the praise of county officials for their service. Based on this success, the church has now decided to keep the stall open for a longer period each year. [ANS]
Kuo Siu-may, Wife Of Bishop Ting, Dies

Kuo Siu-may, professor of English language at Nanjing University and wife of CCC president Bishop K.H. Ting, died in Nanjing September 24. She was 79 years old.

Kuo Siu-may was a graduate of St. John's University in Shanghai, and held a masters degree from Columbia University in New York. She taught at Nanjing University from 1954 until 1987, and even continued working into her retirement. Active in student work as a young woman, she was also vice-chair of the Jiangsu Women's Federation. In recent years, she published two books introducing the Bible to Chinese students of English literature.

A memorial service for Professor Kuo was held at Mochou Road Church in Nanjing, which was packed with mourners, and also attended by some of her friends from abroad. [ANS]

Chinese Christian Women Hold Workshop At NGO Forum On Women

Chinese Christian women are playing an active part in women's development work in China. More than 650,000 women were reached by YWCA programs in 1994, and tens of thousands of women have become literate through church efforts. This information was shared at a workshop entitled "Women, Church, Society", jointly run by women from the Chinese YWCA and the China Christian Council at the NGO Forum On Women held in conjunction with the UN's Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing. The workshop, at a hard to find site off the conference area, was overcrowded with several hundred women crowding into a rather small room. Christian participants at the forum had at many times expressed their wish to meet with their Chinese sisters.

As the first speaker, Dr. Zheng Huaimei from the YWCA National Committee titled her speech "Forward In Faith --- The Chinese YWCA's Concern & Response To Women Issues Of Today." Speaking about the growing unemployment of women in Chinese cities, Dr. Zheng told participants that many YWCAs are now conducting training classes, which enable women to find new employment. Such classes include a training as nurse's aids, in accounting, home economics, preschool education, computer science, and professional training in community work. Reaching out from the major cities where the YWCA has traditionally been active, YWCA rural community centers have been set up in Fengyang County (Anhui Province), Huangpi County (Hubei Province), and Pinggu County (Beijing City).

Ms. Alice Yuk of the Hongkong YWCA told the participants that there was increasing cooperation between the Ys in Hongkong and mainland China. Young Hongkong volunteers work in rural community projects on the mainland, while increasing numbers of mainland women visit Hongkong to learn from the Y's work there.

Rev. Cao Shengjie, one of the vice-presidents of the [OVER]
Chinese Christian Women Hold Workshop At NGO Forum...

China Christian Council, talked about the Chinese Christian women's role in education and development. Noting that many of the women Christians in China's rural areas are illiterate, Cao reported that many churches are now running Bible literacy classes. The text for these classes is a primer published by the China Christian Council, which combines basic reading skills with fundamental Biblical knowledge. Cao said that within the churches, women's position had improved greatly in the last forty years: By the end of 1994, there were 223 ordained women pastors, about 1/6 of the total. Women made up 57% of the students and 47% of the faculty in theological seminaries. Nevertheless, a survey held among female church workers (see ANS 95.4.8) showed that true equality between men and women had not yet been reached within the churches. For example, only 21% of the participants of the National Christian Conference in 1991 were women. Cao said that church women were striving for at least 30% female participation at the next conference in 1996. [ANS]

ANS 95.5.12

News In Brief

A Braille Printing Press has been installed at the Amity Printing Company in Nanjing, and the production of Bibles for the blind has started. In the next three years, about 1,000 Braille Bibles will be printed and distributed. Each such Bible consists of 32 volumes. The printing of Braille Bibles became possible with the help of the United Bible Societies, which funded the press and will fund the next three years' production. Help also came from Beijing University which donated a computer program to translate regular text into Braille.

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New churches: Local believers raised more than 700,000 RMB to build the enormous Xiaosijia Church in Taizhou City, Zhejiang Province. *** The congregation in Xinjie Village, Yuyi County, Jiangsu Province, was established only a year ago, but just finished a church building of 300 square meters. *** Christians in Xiao County, Anhui Province, started a ten-year plan towards church building in 1985. Their new church, seating more than 700, was dedicated this summer. *** Rulijin County, which came to revolutionary fame during the Long March, now has eight church buildings which together can seat more than 4,000 believers. The church in the county town, seating 1,500, is the biggest in Jiangxi Province. And an old church rebuilt: Menling Church in Jiadong County, Guangdong Province, was first built in 1865. In 1958 it was torn down. With donations from local believers as well as from Christians overseas, the church was rebuilt this year.

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A big revival meeting at Longwan Church in Wenzhou City, Zhejiang Province, drew more than 5,000 participants. [OVER]
News In Brief...

The new lay training center in Shaoxing City, Zhejiang Province (see ANS 95.4.6), will be put to good use. According to Rev. Deng Fucun, General Secretary of the Zhejiang Christian Council, five training courses of 40 days' length will be held there every year. Each course will have 40 participants. Training will include Biblical knowledge, evangelism, pastoral care, church administration and church building.

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Hangzhou Theological Seminary has switched from a two- to a three-year program. Its student intake this year was 60.

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The three hundred-odd Lisu inhabiting Shibacha village in Yinjiang County are all Christians. They teamed up to rebuild their primary school building, formerly made of grass. The new wooden building now has vehicle access as well, because the Christians also improved the road leading to it. [ANS]

ANS 95.5.13

ANS Documentation: A Letter From The China Christian Council

22 October, 1995

Dear Friends,

We understand that there will be an international ecumenical meeting in Taiwan in a few weeks time. The China Christian Council surely has no objection to the holding of such meetings in Taiwan or anywhere else which encourage church partnership and build up relationships within the international Christian community. We hope that we may also be able to attend future meetings in Taiwan in order to exchange experiences in building up the Church of Jesus Christ.

However, in past years, there have also been meetings called in the name of the church which have served to deepen the division between Christians on the two sides of the Taiwan Straits, and this gives us cause for concern. As preparations are made for this forthcoming meeting, our prayer is that it will help to promote dialogue and reconciliation, not division or confrontation based on political considerations. We will follow reports on this gathering with great interest.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop K.H. Ting, President
Dr. Wenzao Han, Acting General Secretary
China Christian Council
ANS Feature:  
"Don't Deconstruct, Just Create!" - Women Discover Their Power

The 4th UN Conference on Women took place in Beijing on September 5 to 15, 1995. Just prior to this, from August 30 to September 8, women from non-governmental organizations met for an international forum. ANS editor Claudia Währisch-Oblau participated in the NGO Forum as a delegate of the World Council of Churches. This is her report.

"I feel like a raindrop that has fallen into the ocean. All of a sudden, we are strong and powerful!" The Indian activist Kamla Basin voiced what we all felt. The ten-day Women's Forum of non-governmental organizations in Huairou, close to Beijing, was an empowering and encouraging experience for all who could take part.

Of course, there were problems. Many women did not get their visas on time, and some organizations were denied visas up front. In the end, only about 25,000 of the 36,000 registered participants made it to the forum. Once there, they found the conference area too far from the site of the UN conference, and not well equipped. Finally, Chinese security officers trailed and intimidated exiled Tibetans and lesbian activists and prevented all demonstrations from being taken out into the streets of Huairou.

But: "The few technical problems we are encountering in Huairou are nothing compared to the problems women usually face when they want to be heard," said American radio journalist Laura Flanders amidst thunderous applause in one of the plenary sessions. Heat and cold, pouring rain that caused discussion tents to collapse, overcrowded meeting rooms and a lack of technical equipment didn't prevent the 25,000 women who had made it to Beijing from working. "This conference is the biggest meeting of marginalized experts that the world has ever seen," declared Laura Flanders. Indeed, most plenary and workshop sessions were of very high quality.

As participants, we had a hard time deciding what to attend. At any given time, women (with the occasional man among them) could choose between up to 120 workshops, not to mention cultural activities, demonstrations, and spontaneous meetings. Workshops centered on just about any issue, be it antenatal gender diagnosis and the abortion of female foetuses, lesbianism for the curious, or the role of women in small animal husbandry. No world problem was ignored - after all the slogan of the forum was "Look at the World Through Women's Eyes." And these women weren't a uniform mass: You could meet black-veiled Iranians as well as African women in colorful dresses, young girls in jeans and old ladies in smart suits, Latin-American peasants and Scandinavian government ministers, Azerbeijanian woman oil workers and Japanese housewives.

Within this enormous variety, several issues came up again and again, running like a constant thread through all activities. One of them was "peace", an issue that the 4,000 Japanese delegates brought up in an especially forceful way. With new and innovative daily activities, they protested against nuclear arms. But there wasn't just protest. Palestinian and Israeli women, Bosnians and Serbs, women from Sudan, Liberia - and many other countries reported about their efforts to achieve peace in their countries.

Take for example the "White Scarf Movement" from Georgia: It is a Georgian tradition that women can stop their menfolk from fighting by throwing a white scarf around their neck. This tradition was revived during the Abchian recessionist war: Hundreds of Georgian women chartered a railway train and went right to the front line, distributing white scarfs all over the place. Says the founder of the movement proudly: "For four days, not a single shot was fired. Isn't that an achievement?" Or take the "grassroots diplomacy" of women from Armenia and Azerbeijan: They regularly organize meetings, usually on neutral ground, where women from these two warring countries come together. American advisors help in the difficult process of talking to each other, which only works because [OVER]
"Don't Deconstruct, Just Create!".../2

everyone has to follow strict procedural rules: No interruptions, no mumbling, and designating exactly the same time for each person to speak. In this way, women start to realize that their problems are very much the same and can only be solved together. Through this process, the women hope to create a climate that will enable the Armenian and Azerbaijani government to seriously negotiate peace. As their model they cite women’s peace groups in Israel and the Occupied Territories, without whose efforts there would be no Near East peace process today.

Another important theme was “violence against women”, an issue not even mentioned at UN conferences as recently as 10 years ago. Women from Africa reported on female genital mutilation, Europeans and Americans had exchanges about the root causes of domestic violence, and women migrant workers – many of them domestic helpers – from Asia, Africa and Latin America organized a big caucus to demand their rights in a more forceful way. The structural causes of this violence were not forgotten: Large numbers of workshops analyzed the consequences of structural readjustment for women in the two-thirds world; others focused on the enormous problems women face since the breakdown of socialism in the former Eastern Bloc.

The numerous church- and Christian-oriented NGOs present in Beijing were very much part of the discussion process. Workshops organized by the World Council of Churches or the Ecumenical Women United had the most international character, with panels often representing all continents. Activities organized by independent Catholic groups and a workshop run by Christian women from China met with huge interest. Women of faith, be they Christian, Muslim or Buddhist, agreed that spirituality was empowering, but fundamentalism was detrimental to women’s rights.

Finally: In plenary sessions and workshops, women made it very clear that they wanted to be heard and taken seriously. “We are the majority” was an often-heard slogan. Many women talked about the “critical mass” which would be necessary for real change: Experiences from Scandinavia, for example, show that women can only successfully address women’s issues and concerns when they hold at least 30% of the executive posts in organizations, administrations, or governments. “Token women” do not promote change. But all women know that rights aren’t given, they have to be fought for. Therefore, numerous workshops dealt with strategies for change, with education of female children and curricula that will enhance girls’ chances, or with economic know-how to help women set up successful businesses. Groups which have successfully been working with electronic media ran a training center where women could learn to navigate the Internet.

It was this practical and positive attitude that distinguished the Huairou NGO Forum from other conferences. There was little griping and whining, instead women said “we can do better!” Or, as the Korean theologian Chun Hyung-Kyung put it in one of the WCC workshops: “Don’t deconstruct, just create!“ Because when we get to the kingdom of heaven, God – she – will only ask us two things: How much do you love? and: How much did you create?” And while it can be very discouraging to face all the world’s problems at once, Huairou had the contrary effect: To see what women all over the world have already achieved, to see women’s intelligence, imagination and the energy with which they are working for solutions was encouraging, or, as the buzzword went, “empowering”. In Huairou it was visible and palpable that women who are working for change are not alone. And while conflicts did exist – not all women have the same interests – the whole forum was permeated by a sense of cameraderie and sisterhood, of mutual help and openness that can rarely be found.

Huairou is past, as is the UN conference on women. The drops of water are no longer a single ocean, but spread out all over the world. Nevertheless, the knowledge that together we form an ocean stays with us. Networks started or renewed in Huairou will strengthen women in the future. There will be growing pressure on governments to implement what all these nice-sounding UN documents say. And where governments refuse to move, women will simply do things themselves. After all: We are the majority! [ANS]