



**DECADE FOR
WOMEN CONFERENCE:**

**Bella
Steals The
Show**

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The hit of Nairobi, Bella Abzug, above. A banquet opened the Decade for Women conference in Kenya's capital.

AP Photos

By Brooke W. Kroeger
Newsday Staff Correspondent
NAIROBI, KENYA

BELLA set the tone. The other American feminist leaders in Nairobi for "Forum '85" grumble that Bella Abzug is one of only two in their contingent who ever gets any attention.

The truth is, Abzug just plain knows how to do it.

Betty Friedan has been holding court as a somewhat gimmicky guru to groups of up to 75 women under a tree on the University of Nairobi campus — despite the groans it has produced from her American sisters.

But it is Abzug who knows how to pack in the crowds.

Some 11,000 women — draped in saris, shrouded in chadors, in slacks and skirts, in vibrantly colored African garb — have journeyed to this intensive 10-day celebration of the end of the United Nations-proclaimed Decade for Women, which winds up today.

With more than 1,000 workshops, not to mention the remarkably good-natured overcrowding and confusion, getting a large turnout for a single workshop is something of a coup.

Abzug took over the place Wednesday.

She landed the largest auditorium on campus, picked the best time slot (just after lunch), and smothered the participants for days in advance with flyers announcing her topic: "What If Women Ruled the World?"

The speculative nature of the subject was no problem. She put on similar workshops in Copenhagen five years ago and in Mexico City five years before that when the Decade for Women began.

Yet for the assemblage in Nairobi, the absence of women from the ranks of high-level decision-makers is still considered the major block to women's advancement and peace on earth.

And then, a woman has to give form to utopia if she wants to know what to do when she gets there.

Translators and UN-style earphones were on hand to turn each speaker's words into French, Spanish, English, Arabic and the local Swahili.

By borrowing from the government delegations to the parallel, but more official UN Decade for Women conference downtown, Abzug brought together a panel of 18 from 15 countries — parliamentarians, ministers of state and politically prominent women. They were from countries as diverse as Nicaragua, France, India, Australia, Japan, Ireland and Mexico. The auditorium was jammed.

"Without political power, women will not be able to change the social and economic traditions that oppress them," Abzug began.

Then she put the utopian question: "If women ruled the world, would the world be different, and how?"

Kenya's only elected woman member of parliament, Fibi Asiyo, spoke first.

"I don't know if it would be any different," she said. "I have a feeling they would copy" the way it is now.

She said men and women ruling together was the answer.

Then she added a kicker echoed re-



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If women become like men in their decision-making "then the struggle is lost."

—Margaret Papandreou

IF WOMEN RULED THE WORLD

peatedly by her colleagues on the dais: "Unless and until women plan how to support women leaders, there is no way that women will have 50 percent representation in parliament. Women can be their own worst enemies," she said.

Margaret Papandreou brought down the house with her remarks, the audience apparently disregarding her having what is known in these circles as "derivative power," being the wife of Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou. American-born, she is a respected feminist and leader of the Women's Union of Greece.

"Ideology is political in developing the foundations for the struggle," she said. "The more cohesion and unity in the organization, the stronger it will be and the more likely to succeed."

IN EUROPE, the road to political power is through the party, but we must also work in separate women's organizations, challenging all patriarchal attitudes and discovering what posts in government are the most potent sources of power.

"That's easy enough," she quipped. "Just find out where there are more men."

If women become like men in their decision-making, she said, "then the struggle is lost."

She named the issues not considered important in today's decision-making circles: child-care centers, public transportation, good meals for children available outside the home, so-

cial programs and information on contraception.

"I've never heard a man demand more child-care centers," she said. "Perhaps if he had the sole responsibility for raising children, he would."

With 13 million people unemployed in Common Market countries, the subject was not even raised at the European Economic Community's most recent ministerial council — "even with [British Prime Minister Margaret] Thatcher there," Papandreou said.

Rep. Claudine Schneider (R-R. I.) acknowledged that in the U.S. Congress, the tendency of women representatives is still to go along with the men.

"That's not the approach we should take," she said. "Women lack the self-confidence to fulfill their goals. With more women, we would feel more than just [confident] in pushing our goals ahead."

"We have the opportunity to nurture husbands, brothers and children to teach the nurturing of the Earth and the value of world peace," she said.

Israel's Tamar Eshel, a two-term Knesset member, now on the Jerusalem city council, dismissed any talk of pushing the angle that women need to be in power because they are more emotional and more perceptive.

"That's when they put us in a corner," she said. She mentioned the late Prime Minister Golda Meir: "She was a good prime minister," she said. "But do you think it made any difference in the progress of women? Men would tell

us, 'What else do you want? You already have a prime minister.'

"A bird cannot fly with one wing," she said. "In the present circumstances, I'm not so sure the women wouldn't imitate the behavior of men in power."

She said the work now must be done at the grass roots level — encouraging daughters to go into politics and ensuring women's full participation in politics and government without the extra burden of family and home.

"The hand that rocks the cradle should also rock the boat," said Franca Arena, a state senator in Australia's New South Wales.

"The women now in parliament have become de facto men. We have to guard against that," she said.

Sweden's disarmament ambassador, Majbritt Theorin, said it was clear that if women ruled the world there would be more food than weapons and "we would not listen so much to the generals when they threaten war."

"There would be fewer babies in the world," since women would be otherwise engaged. "And there would be fewer men in politics and more men home taking care of babies," she said to roars of approval.

The questions started coming from the audience. "Why won't women support women?"

"It's a process," Abzug said. "Once women didn't like to go to women doctors or lawyers. It takes time."

From a Filipina: "Should we form a women's political party?"

"No," said Sweden's Theorin. "It's not possible. As a Socialist, I don't often share views with some of my women counterparts in the parliament. We have to interest the existing political parties."

AN ATTORNEY to India's Supreme Court, Rani Jethmalani, hit on what, for this group, was the saddest fact.

"We have had two Asian prime ministers," she said of Sri Lanka's Sirimavo Bandaranaike and the late Indian leader Indira Gandhi. "And the experience was very painful."

Gandhi, she said, suspended all fundamental human rights with her 1976 emergency decree; offered no reform on women's issues; declined to foster a Mideast dialogue during her leadership of the non-aligned movement and instead criticized Israel, and never condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

While she was prime minister, Bandaranaike abolished the right of judicial review of executive actions and introduced the Sinhalese language act, thus depriving ethnic minorities of their right to use their own languages in their own country, she explained. "How can we ensure," she asked, "that women who come to power will have healing, nurturing, caring qualities?"

Again, Abzug gave the reply. "We need women who are committed to change and the elimination of oppression," she said. "And that's the only way you can get women to change the nature of power."

"These women are products of the male power structure," she said. "If they were from the women's movement, they'd be different." ■