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The Polish Delegation at the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women Copenhagen, 14–30 July 1980

Polska delegacja na Światowej Konferencji Dekady Kobiet ONZ

Kopenhaga 14–30 lipca 1980

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In 1975, the UN General Assembly declared the years 1975–1985 the Decade for Women, at the same time announcing a World Plan of Action for women's equal rights as well as their participation in development programmes and the struggle for peace. The article analyses the process of the Polish delegation's preparations for the second world conference on women, which took place in Copenhagen in 1980 under the title Equality-Development-Peace. Aspects and procedures of the conference's organisation have been presented, as well as the composition and the key objectives of the Polish governmental delegation in the light of documents of the National Council of Polish Women.

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W 1975 r. Zgromadzenie Ogólne ONZ ustanowiło lata 1975–1985 Dekadą Kobiet, ogłaszając jednocześnie Światowy Plan Działania na rzecz równych praw kobiet, ich udziału w programach rozwoju i w walce o pokój. W artykule przeanalizowano proces przygotowań polskiej delegacji do udziału w drugiej Światowej Konferencji Kobiet, która odbyła się w Kopenhadze w 1980 r. pod hasłem – „Równość–Rozwój–Pokój”. Przedstawiono aspekty i procedury organizacji konferencji, a także skład i podstawowe cele polskiej delegacji rządowej w świetle dokumentów Krajowej Rady Kobiet Polskich.

Introduction

In the rhetoric concerning the assessment of the activities of women's movements active in socialist countries between 1945 and 1989, it is common to accept *a priori* the premise that they were typical propaganda exercises lacking real agency in what they did. This is the aftermath of an unequivocally critical assessment of the socialist state system as being non-sovereign and not respecting the basic standards of democratic states under the rule of law. The consequence is a relatively sparse literature on the subject, especially that going beyond the convention indicated above.¹ Absent are considerations analysing the international activity of the post-war women's movement in the socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland.² According to Francisco de Haan, this is influenced by the still

- 1 Recently, the following works have been published: *Gender, generations, and communism in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond*, eds A. Artwińska, A. Mroziak, Routledge, New York 2021; K. Stańczak-Wiślicz, P. Perkowski, M. Fidelis, B. Klich-Kluczevska, *Kobiety w Polsce 1945–1989: nowoczesność, równouprawnienie, komunizm*, Universitas, Kraków 2020; K. Ghodsee, *Kobiety, socjalizm i dobry seks. Argumenty na rzecz niezależności ekonomicznej*, Post Factum, Katowice 2020; M. Mikołajczyk, *Kontestatorki. Formy zaangażowania kobiet w Polsce po 1945 roku*, [in:] *Ruchy kobiece na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku. Stan badań i perspektywy*, eds M. Dajnowicz, A. Miodowski, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Białystok 2020, pp. 131–154; M. Dajnowicz, *“The League of Women” (Liga Kobiet) – the conditions for functioning of the women’s organisation in the communist system of the Polish People’s Republic (in the first period of the organisation’s activity from 1945 to 1975)*, *“Czasopismo Naukowe Instytutu Studiów Kobięcych”* 2020, no. 2, pp. 186–207; E. Chrobaczyńska-Plucińska, *Halina Skibniewska – posłanka i pierwsza wicemarszałkini w dziejach polskiego parlamentaryzmu (1965–1985). Szkic do biografii*, [in:] *Kobiety w Polsce. Polska kobietom*, ed. A. Chamera-Nowak, Wydawnictwo Naukowe i Edukacyjne Stowarzyszenia Bibliotekarzy Polskich, Warszawa 2022, pp. 124–145; eadem, *Posłanki w organach ustawodawczych 1944/45–1956. Cechy socjopolityczne i aktywność poselska*, [in:] *Kobiety w wyborach. Wybory kobiet*, eds Ł. Tomczak, K. Zawadzka-Witt, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2020, pp. 9–26; eadem, *Profesorki w sejmach PRL – przyczynek do badań subiektywnego poczucia sprawczości*, *“Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Politologica”* 2020, No. 24, pp. 108–121.
- 2 International aspects of the activity of the Polish women's movement in the communist period have been analysed primarily in M. Grabowska. M. Garbowska, *Zerwana genealogia. Sprawczość działaczek społecznych i politycznych w socjalistycznej Polsce i Gruzji a współczesne ruchy kobiece*, *“Lud. Organ Polskiego Towarzystwa Ludoznawczego i Komitetu Nauk Etnologicznych”* 2015, no. XCIX, pp. 185–207;

dominant scholarly conviction about the western, liberal origins of the history of women's movements and feminisms, which leads to obvious simplifications and the omission in research of organisations associated with the popular movement, or with leftist roots, seen only through the prism of their propaganda goals.³ Kristen Ghodsee also writes about the common stereotypes of socialist women's organisations and the effectiveness of 'state feminism'⁴, noting at the same time that transnational research is also hampered by other, more mundane obstacles: language and financial barriers, as well as often limited access to archival material.⁵ Hence the important role of regional research, which, although only partial, makes a valid contribution and provides an important addition to the gaps in the history of international movements and feminisms of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Ten years after. Communism and feminism revisited, by: F. de Haan, K. Ghodsee, K. Daskalova, M. Grabowska, J. Lukić, Ch. Bonfiglioli, R. M. Popa, A. Ghit, "Aspasia. The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History" 2016, no. 10, pp. 102–168; M. Grabowska, *Bits of freedom: demystifying women's activism under state socialism in Poland and Georgia*, "Feminist Studies" 2017, no. 43 (1), pp. 141–168; eadem, *Zerwana genealogia: działalność społeczna i polityczna kobiet po 1945 roku a współczesny polski ruch kobiecy*, Warszawa 2018; eadem, *Overcoming the "delay" paradigm new approaches to socialist women's activism in Georgia and Poland*, [in:] *Gender in Georgia: feminist perspectives on culture, nation, and history in the South Caucasus*, eds M. Barkaia, A. Waterston, Berghahn Books 2018; eadem, *Transformacja ruchów kobiecych w Polsce (1945–1956)*, "Czasopismo Naukowe Instytutu Studiów Kobiety" 2019, no. 2, pp. 28–58.

- 3 F. de Haan, *Continuing Cold War paradigms in western historiography of transnational women's organisations: the case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)*, "Women's History Review" 2010, no. 19 (4), pp. 547–573; K. Daskalova, *Entangled histories of women's movements and feminisms: an interview with Francisca de Haan*, "Feminist Encounters. A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics" 2020, no. 4(2):30, pp. 2–3.
- 4 K. Ghodsee, *Pressuring the politburo: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and state socialist feminism*, "Slavic Review" 2014, no. 73(3), pp. 538–562; K. Ghodsee, *Second world, Second sex: socialist women's activism and global solidarity during the Cold War*, Duke University Press, Durham 2019; C. Bonfiglioli, *Women's activism, the cold war, and the UN decade for women (1975–1985)*, "Aspasia" 2020, no. 14, pp. 144–147.
- 5 K. Ghodsee, *Research note: The historiographical challenges of exploring second world-third world alliances in the international women's movements*, "Global Social Policy" 2014, no. 14(2), pp. 260.

Three international conferences, held in Mexico, Copenhagen and Nairobi under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) between 1975 and 1985, played an important role in the process of consolidating the international women's movement in the post-war period.⁶ Women activists from all over the world met to debate how to improve women's equality rights and the peaceful interaction of nations. The second conference, held in Copenhagen in 1980, brought together representatives of capitalist, socialist and Third World countries, a total of around 1,500⁷ delegates from 145 countries.⁸ Women's issues of the time were dealt with in the shadow of international politics, the clashing interests of the Cold War blocs and the conflicts in the Middle East.⁹ The conference was dominated by issues related to employment policy and equal access to resources, the problem of poverty, education levels, health care, the world peace agenda, apartheid issues and the situation of refugee women.

In Polish research, apart from the work of Magdalena Grabowska, the transnational history of the Women's Decade is virtually absent. In this article, based on archival documents collected in the Central Archives of Modern Records (Polish acronym used hereinafter: AAN) in Warsaw, I trace the process of preparation, composition and projected participation of the Polish governmental delegation in the second conference of the Decade in Copenhagen in 1980. Interesting and at the same time atypical for research conducted in Poland are the assessments of championing equalitarian political concepts of capitalist countries, including – above

- 6 C. Bunch, *Opening doors for feminism: UN World Conferences on Women*, "Journal of Women's History" 2012, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 213–221; A. O'Donoghue, A. Rowe, *Feminism, global inequality, and the 1975 Mexico city conference*, [in:] *Women and the UN. A new history of women's international human rights*, eds R. Adami, D. Plesch, Routledge, London 2021, pp. 88–103.
- 7 J. Malone, *Copenhagen hosts World Conference of Women*, "The Christian Science Monitor", 14 July 1980, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150921232308/http://www.csmonitor.com/1980/0714/071469.html> [access: 3 IX 2020].
- 8 *1980 World Conference on Women Copenhagen*, http://www.5wwc.org/conference_background/1980_wcw.html [access: 12 IV 2020].
- 9 Israeli-Arab wars, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in which the USA and the USSR became involved. The 1978–1979 Islamic Revolution and the Iran hostage crisis. For more, see: B. Bankowicz, M. Bankowicz, A. Dudek, *Leksykon historii XX wieku*, Wydawnictwo GEO, Kraków 1996, pp. 46–49, 100, 237–239.

all – the American delegation, in terms of failure, against the representatives of the socialist-bloc countries identified as effective activities in the implementation of the world peace programme.¹⁰ Underlying these are also the personal accounts of Western women's movement activists, and participants in the Decade Conference. They recalled the conviction accompanying them at the time that women from the socialist bloc enjoyed relatively high levels of education, the highest employment rates in the world and experienced greater legal equality than women in capitalist countries.¹¹ This assessment positioned the representatives of the delegations of the socialist countries as active, equal and effective activists in the space of the transnational women's movement, whose specific resolutions and declarations were effectively recorded in the memories of the delegates of the Western countries and reflected in UN documents.

International aspects and procedures related to the organisation of the conference

In 1975, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed the years 1975–1985 as the Decade for Women. This was a consequence of the International Women's Year celebrated back then and the first world conference on women held in Mexico in 1975. At its 30th session, the UNGA adopted the World Plan of Action for the equal rights of women, as well as their participation in development programmes and the struggle for peace, and recognised the need for periodic evaluations of the implementation of the programme's objectives. On the basis of these principles, the UN organised the second world conference on women in Copenhagen¹² from 14 to 30 July 1980 under the title Equality-Development-Peace.

10 K. Ghodsee, *Revisiting the United Nations decade for women: Brief reflections on feminism, capitalism and Cold War politics in the early years of the international women's movement*, "Women's Studies International Forum" 2010, no. 33, pp. 7. For more, see: J. S. Jaquette, *Losing the battle/winning the war: international politics, women's issues, and the 1980 Mid-Decade Conference*, [in:] *Women, politics, and the United Nations*, ed. A. Winslow, Greenwood Press, London 1995, pp. 45–59.

11 K. Ghodsee, *Revisiting the United Nations decade for women...*, pp. 4–5.

12 Initially, the conference venue was to be Teheran, but the international situation and political considerations led the organisers to change the location. Central

When defining its main objectives, attention was drawn to the need to review, evaluate and summarise the results of the implementation of national, regional and international programmes of the first half of the decade. The issues addressed were employment, healthcare and education of women, which corresponded to the primary objectives originally adopted in Mexico. The issue of world peace took on particular importance in view of the difficult international situation. It was underlined in the documents that the conference participants had to deal with the problems of apartheid and the growing number of Palestinian refugees, mainly women and children.¹³ As a result of an agreement between the UN and the Danish Government, meetings were also planned in parallel with the conference proceedings in the framework of the NGO Forum from 14 to 24 July. A large number of representatives of international social and political organisations had announced their participation, and disarmament issues were to become a leading theme of the deliberations.¹⁴

The International Preparatory Committee (IPC) of the World Conference on the Decade for Women was established on 12 May 1977 on the basis of a resolution of the UN Economic and Social Council.¹⁵ Respecting the geographical principle, its members included Australia, Brazil, Venezuela, Egypt, India, Iran, Madagascar, Mexico, Niger, Nigeria, the Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Senegal, the United Kingdom, the USA, Uganda, the Philippines, Japan and the Soviet bloc countries: the USSR, the GDR, Yugoslavia and Cuba.¹⁶ The Committee held three

Archives of Modern Records (Polish acronym used hereinafter: AAN), Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polish acronym used hereinafter: KC PZPR), XL/68, Memo on Poland's preparation for the World Conference on Women, Copenhagen 1980 half way through the UN Decade for Women (1976–1985), (October 1979), no page numbering.

- 13 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Memo on the preparation of the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women in Copenhagen, (May 1980), no page numbering.
- 14 Ibidem, no page numbering.
- 15 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Preparatory Committee of the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women, no page numbering.
- 16 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Władysław Neneman's memo on the organisation of the Copenhagen conference (1979), no page numbering.

meetings and its work was also attended by observer members,¹⁷ including those from Poland.¹⁸

The first meeting took place in Vienna on 19–30 June 1978. The draft provisional agenda for the conference drawn up by the UN Secretariat took into account the guidelines of the Commission on the Status of Women,¹⁹ of which Poland was not a member at that time.²⁰ Apart from the organisational

- 17 Among the representatives of countries with observer status were Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Guatemala, Ireland, Israel, Jamaica, New Zealand, FRG, Romania, Sudan, Sweden, Togo, and countries which are not members of the UN – Switzerland (membership since 2002) and the Vatican. Various types of organisations were also present, which clearly showed an interest in the planned conference. The UN Secretary was represented by a number of committees – ECA, ESCAP, ECE, ECLA, ECWA and the Department of Technical Cooperation for Development. Representatives from UN bodies – UN Children’s Fund, UN Population Action Fund, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UN Industrial Development, World Food Programme (WFP) and UN Development Programme were present. UN bodies – Special Committee on Apartheid. Various specialised institutions – the ILO, World Bank, FAO, UNESCO, WHO; international organisations – Inter-American Commission of American Women of the Organisation of the States of the Americas, League of Arab States, Organisation of African Unity; national liberation movements – African National Congress, Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Pan-African Congress of Azania, Zimbabwe Patriotic Front (PF/ZANU/ZAPU); NGOs – International Conference of Free Unions, International Federation for Family Planning, Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF), International Federation of University Women, and the World Union of Catholic Women’s Organisations. AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Preparatory Committee of the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women, no page numbering.
- 18 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Memo on the preparation of the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women in Copenhagen, (May 1980), no page numbering.
- 19 *Commission on the Status of Women. Report on the twenty-seventh session (20 March – 5 April 1978)*, <http://undocs.org/en/E/CN.6/620/REV.1> [access: 3 IV 2020]. The Commission on the Status of Women is one of the nine functional commissions of the UN Economic and Social Council. Cf *Organizacja Narodów Zjednoczonych: bilans i perspektywy*, red. J. Symonides, Wydawnictwo Naukowe „Scholar”, Warszawa 2006, p. 53. For more, see: C. Hannan, A. Iiyambo, C. Brautigam, *A short history of the Commission on the Status of Women*, New York 2019 [access: 22 IX 2020]: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2019/a-short-history-of-the-csw_en.pdf?la=en&vs=1153.
- 20 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/68, Władysław Neneman’s memo on the organisation of the Copenhagen conference (1979), no page numbering The Polish People’s Republic was a member of the Commission on the Status of Women in the period

and administrative issues,²¹ the achievements and difficulties encountered in the implementation of the tasks of the half of the first Decade were assessed and a preliminary programme for the following five years (1981–1985) was adopted, including a plan for the integration and participation of women in economic and social development, employment, health care and education. At the first session of the IPC, the African states, with the active support of the socialist countries, proposed that an item on the impact of apartheid on the situation of women in southern Africa be formally placed on the agenda of the conference. This issue corresponded with the International Anti-Apartheid Year proclaimed in 1978. This initiative was met with criticism from representatives of Western bloc countries, who sought to depoliticise the conference by arguing that the cause of gender inequality was primarily the patriarchal system and existing systemic solutions. Nevertheless, the socialist countries successfully championed the idea that gender equality policy could not be separated from the political and economic issues of the day, and thus from international policy disputes.²² In their rhetoric, they invoked issues of poverty, exploitation, imperialism, colonialism, violence and military aspirations geared to economic and political effect. Despite the clear opposition of Western countries, many delegations recognised and emphasised the importance, timeliness and necessity of discussing issues of current international politics at the planned conference. Consequently,

1951–1968. Cf. A. Mroziak, *Zofia Dembińska – zapomniana „architektka PRL-u”. Krytyczny przyczynek do feministycznej teorii i praktyki biograficznej w Polsce*, “Teksty Drugie” 2019, no. 3, pp. 264.

- 21 The organisational side of the conference was supervised by the UN Secretary-General, Kurt Josef Waldheim. The composition of the IPC and its Bureau was established, with the election of Presiding Officer – Lena Guéye – Senegal, her deputies – Helga Hörz – East Germany, F. L. Schlingemann – the Netherlands, Veronika Penalerer de Lepage – Venezuela and a Rapporteur – Scheyla Shahkar – Iran. The Rules of Procedure and Agenda were provisionally proposed, two main Commissions were elected and a Credentials Committee was set up. The speaking time for the plenary session was set at 15 minutes. The official documentation of the conference, prepared by teams of specialists and consultants of the UN Secretariat, was distributed to the participants about six months before the conference. The draft budget was estimated at \$2,832,968. AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Preparatory Committee of the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women, no page numbering.
- 22 K. Ghodsee, *Revisiting the United Nations decade for women...*, p. 4.

in the face of existing disagreements, the IPC did not adopt a final decision on the preliminary agenda of the conference ceding it to the Economic and Social Council as the main organiser. It was not until its following meeting, at the UN headquarters in New York from 27 August to 8 September 1979, which was already attended by the Secretary General of the World Conference Lucille Mathurin Mair from Jamaica,²³ that the IPC adopted the provisional agenda for the event.²⁴ There was a lively discussion on the participation of non-governmental organisations in the conference, whose speaking time was significantly reduced as a result of the decisions taken, a fact seen as downgrading the position and status of these meetings.²⁵ Some participants of the session also called for the inclusion in the basic conference documents of the Declaration on Racism and Racial Prejudice adopted in Lusaka in July 1979,²⁶ on the grounds that these were issues directly related to the conference theme. However, L. Mair pointed out that it was not the role of the IPC to develop a new programme of action for the following years of the Decade, as the general framework and directions for the implementation of the objectives had been adopted in Mexico, and should only be made more specific and precise in view of the experience gained at that time.²⁷ Additionally, another session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place in late February/early March 1980, which was dominated by the problems surrounding the organisation of the Copenhagen conference. The participants were divided over the proposal to include on the agenda an item

23 L. M. Mair (1924–2009) – a writer, politician and diplomat. In 1982, she was the first woman to ever become Under Secretary General of the United Nations. Cf B. Bush, *Women's History Month: Lucille Mathurin-Mair (née Waldron), 1924–2009: Pioneer of Caribbean Women's History*, <https://womenshistorynetwork.org/womens-history-month-lucille-mathurin-mair-nee-waldron-1924-2009-pioneer-of-caribbean-womens-history> [access: 15 VIII 2020].

24 *Provisional rules of procedure of the Conference*, New York: UN, 6 June 1979, A/CONF.94/PC/7.

25 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Preparatory Committee of the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women, no page numbering.

26 *The Lusaka Declaration of the Commonwealth on Racism and Racial Prejudice*, <https://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/inline/Lusaka-Declaration-of-the-Commonwealth.pdf> [access: 22 IX 2020].

27 *Report of the Preparatory Committee on its 2nd session, (United Nations Headquarters, 27 August – 8 September 1979)*, New York: UN, 28 Sept. 1979, A/CONF.94/PC/12.

devoted to the adoption of a Declaration on the Participation of Women in the Struggle for the Strengthening of International Peace and Security and against Colonialism, Racism, Racial Discrimination, Foreign Aggression and Occupation and All Forms of Foreign Domination, for which the socialist bloc countries were striving against the Western states.²⁸ Similarly contentious proved to be a report on the influence of the mass media on views about the role of men and women in society presented by Esmeralda Arboleda Cuevas. Representatives of Poland and the USSR criticised it as biased, stressing that it had been prepared solely on the basis of Western publications, without taking into account the data provided by the socialist countries.²⁹

The final, third meeting took place from 7 to 18 April 1980, also in New York. The issues discussed were highly sensitive which antagonised both sides to the dispute: the impact of apartheid policies on the situation of women in South Africa and of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian women, as well as the conditions of refugee women worldwide. These topics were highly controversial given the Cold War and international politics, in the shadow of which the country delegations held deliberations. Still, the meeting ended with these points included in the formal timetable of the programme of the second half of the Decade and the conference itself, also on the basis of decisions taken at the 34th session of the UNGA.³⁰

In preparation for the Copenhagen meeting, the UN Economic and Social Council also staged numerous side conferences. Implementation

- 28 Resolution 34/158 of 17 December 1979, *World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, Commission on the Status of Women, A/RES/34/158, Report on the twenty-eighth session (25 February – 5 March 1980)*, <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/642> [access: 15 VIII 2020], AAN, KC PZPR, XI/67, Information on the preparation of the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women/Copenhagen 14–31 July 1980, no page numbering.
- 29 AAN, KC PZPR, XI/68, Report by Bogusław Wępa, deputy director of the Welfare Department of the Ministry of Labour, Wages and Welfare [Polish acronym used hereinafter: MPPiSS] from his observation mission to the 28th Session of UN the Committee on the Status of Women (Vienna, 25 February – 5 March 1980), no page numbering.
- 30 Resolution 34/24 of 15 XI 1979, *Implementation of the Programme for the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, A/RES/34/24*; Resolution 34/160 of 17 December 1979, *Provisional agenda for the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, A/RES/34/160*; Resolution 34/161 of 17 December 1979, *Women Refugees, A/RES/34/161*.

was entrusted to regional commissions, specialised organisations and cooperating institutes. The activities of regional groups became an integral part of the agenda and the basis for many official documents, resolutions and recommendations. The topics addressed included economic and social issues, the role and integration of women in the economic development of the regions, as well as their increased participation in the creation of an international economic order. They touched upon educational and educational problems but equally social, welfare and cultural conditions. The issues raised included broadly-understood women's involvement in public life, including politics, and the actual very low participation of women in various decision-making processes, especially at national and international levels, was emphasised.³¹

Composition, guidelines and position of the Polish delegation

Poland's preparations for the second World Conference of the Decade for Women were managed by the Ministry of Labour, Wages and Social Affairs in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Secretariat of the Family Council and the National Council of Polish Women (Polish acronym used hereinafter: KRKP).³² The coordination functions were performed by the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Social Organisations, Sport and Tourism of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (KC PZPR),³³ which resulted from the political principle adopted

31 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Organisation of the Conference. Preliminary proposals for the working agenda of the Copenhagen conference, no page numbering.

32 The National Council of Polish Women operated at the All-Polish Committee of the Front of National Unity (Polish acronym used hereinafter: OK FJN). It played the role of a social representation of all women members of, inter alia, trade unions, farmers' cooperatives, cooperative organisations and the Women's League, before party and political authorities, as well as internationally. Cf P. Skorut, *Front Jedności Narodu. Od narodzin idei do upadku politycznego pozoru*, Attyka, Kraków 2015, p. 148.

33 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Memo on the preparation of the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women in Copenhagen (May 1980), no page numbering. In terms of substance, involved were also the Ministry of Science, Higher Education and Technology (Polish acronym used hereinafter: MNSzWiT), Ministry of Education and Instruction (Polish acronym used hereinafter: MOiW) and the Ministry of Health and Welfare (Polish acronym used hereinafter: MZiOS). AAN, KC PZPR,

in the Polish People's Republic (PPR) that the communist party equalled the state. Therefore, the composition and tasks of the Polish delegation to the conference were the primary responsibility of specific departments of the KC PZPR. Clearly stressed in the documents subject to our analysis was the importance of the conference and the need to intensify the very preparations and to engage in international cooperation.

In September 1977, Eugenia Kempara³⁴ and Anna Stefaniak³⁵ paid on an official visit to Bulgaria on the invitation of the Bulgarian Women's Committee, and their meeting's attendees included Elena Lagadinova. The goal of the trip was a mutual exchange of experiences and familiarisation with the working conditions of the Bulgarian women's movement. Also discussed were the activities of the workforce for coordination of social policy for women and family over the period of the Decade for Women.³⁶ In mid-1977, the KRKP edited a preliminary version of guidelines on the preparation of promotional and propaganda materials. A statistical bulletin *The Polish Woman 1980* was prepared, a photo album with the title 'Socialist Poland and Polish Women', folders showing Polish women in industry, agriculture, culture and research, as well as brochures promoting of communist Poland's social policy for women and family³⁷. The following year, proposals were outlined for thematic blocs to be the focus of the contributions by members of the Polish delegation. The lead motif was the role of women and family in the processes of bringing up for peace, which corresponded

XL/68, Draft programme and timetable of preparation for the Decade for Women Conference in Copenhagen, no page numbering.

- 34 E. Kempara – member of the KC PZPR (1980–1981), president of the Women's League's Executive Board (1975–1981), member of the Council of State (1976–1985), Member of Parliament (1976–1985), president of the KRKP at the OK FJN (1977–1983); T. Mołdawa, *Ludzie władzy 1944–1991*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1991, p. 371.
- 35 A. Stefaniak – Secretary of the Executive Council of the Country Housewives' Association, vice-president of the Voivodeship (Provincial) Council of Polish Women in Łódź, member of the KRKP.
- 36 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/66, Report on the KRKP's visit to Bulgaria on 12–17 september 1977, no page numbering.
- 37 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Publications considered for visits abroad in foreign languages (august 1977), no page numbering.

with the later guidelines contained in resolutions of the Eighth Congress of the PZPR of February 1980.³⁸

The work on the key objectives drew on the KRKP's international contacts, including the experience of cooperation with the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and the Comecon, but also took into account the broader context of the problems raised at the UN.³⁹ The KRKP received a lot of correspondence concerning current conference matters from, among others, German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the USSR, which was a natural consequence not only of their ideological affiliation, but also of the status of those states as formal members of the IPC. In 1979, a delegation from the KRKP participated in the annual meeting of the leaders of women's organisations of socialist countries in the capital of Mongolia, Ulan Bator. The main topic was the question of the organisation of the conference and consultations on the coherence of the position of the socialist countries. The signing, already at the opening ceremony, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women adopted by the UNGA on 18 December 1979 was seen as a priority for the Copenhagen meeting. The originator and author of the earlier 1967 Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,⁴⁰ Poland, played also an active role in the preparation and ratification of the Convention on 18 July 1980, which was done during the Copenhagen conference as originally planned. That is why much emphasis was placed in the preparatory phase on the need to have Poland as one of the first countries to ratify the document.⁴¹ The initiative to formally put the Declaration on the Participation of Women in the Struggle for the Strengthening

38 A. Chłosta-Sikorska, *Polityczne uczestnictwo kobiet w zjazdach Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej z lat 1980–1986. Zarys problematyki*, [in:] *Drogi kobiet do polityki (na przestrzeni XVIII–XXI wieku)*, eds T. Kulak, M. Dajnowicz, Wydawnictwo Chronicon, Wrocław 2016, p. 402.

39 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, International contacts of the KRKP and problems related to them; material for an interview on 16 June 1978 (June 1978), no page numbering.

40 K. Gromkova, M. Regent-Lechowicz, *Sytuacja kobiet a międzynarodowy ruch kobiecy*, „Sprawy Międzynarodowe” 1975, vol. 28, no. 12, pp. 22–23.

41 The document entered into force on 3 September 1981 and was ratified by 187 countries, 40 of which expressed their reservations. AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, The ceremony of the signing of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, no page numbering.

of International Peace and Security and against Colonialism, Racism, Racial Discrimination, Foreign Aggression and Occupation and All Forms of Foreign Domination on the conference agenda was also an important point for the attainment of the political goals of the socialist countries.⁴² This document was a continuation of a project initiated by the GDR back in Mexico in 1975. In the following years, it was discussed on numerous occasions during sessions of the UNGA, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on the Status of Women.⁴³

The conference organisers expected delegations to include senior state officials and, in the case of representation at the Forum, the participation of women in particular.⁴⁴ Since the conference was to, first and foremost, highlight the positions of national governments, as effective can be seen activities meeting political interests defined in terms of state rather than those of individual activists.

The Polish official government delegation consisted of five persons accompanied by a group of five experts. Its chair was Eugenia Kempara and the Polish Government was represented by Mirosława Wąsowicz, undersecretary of state in the Ministry of Light Industry, Maria Regent-Lechowicz,⁴⁵ undersecretary of state in the Ministry of Justice, Bohdan Trąmpczyński, ambassador of the Polish People's Republic to Denmark, and

- 42 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Declaration on the Participation of Women in the Struggle for the Strengthening of International Peace and Security and against Colonialism, Racism, Racial Discrimination, Foreign Aggression and Occupation and All Forms of Foreign Domination (April 1979), no page numbering.
- 43 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Information on the preparation of the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women/Copenhagen 14–31 July 1980/, no page numbering.
- 44 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/68, Report by Bogusław Wępa, deputy director of the Welfare Department of the Ministry of Labour, Wages and Welfare [MPPiSS] from his observation mission to the 28th Session of UN the Committee on the Status of Women (Vienna, 25 February – 5 March 1980), no page numbering.
- 45 M. Regent-Lechowicz (1925–2008) – judge, member of the Democratic Party (Polish acronym used hereinafter: SD) since 1949, deputy minister of justice (1978–1982), activist of, inter alia, the Association of Polish Lawyers, the Women's League and the All-Polish Peace Committee. Active in the international lawyers' movement, she represented Poland in various UN bodies, a member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1982–1986) and Member of Parliament (Sejm of the PPR) (1957–1961). AAN, Stronnictwo Demokratyczne [SD], [1939–1989], 5/451, biographical information, no page numbering.

Krystyna Bożkowa, director of the Warsaw Institute of Mother and Child. The delegation was accompanied by Leon Waściński, a ministerial counsel and head of the Third Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Henryk Sokalski,⁴⁶ deputy director of the Department of International Organisations in that Ministry, Bogusław Wępa, deputy director of the Department of Sejm Affairs in the MPPiSS, as well as two representatives from the departments of the KC PZPR. In addition, five people represented Poland at the Forum: Krystyna Gromek – secretary of the All-Polish Committee of the Front for the Unity of the Nation and the KRKP, Dorota Gierycz – an employee of the Main School of Planning and Statistics and also a member of the KRKP bureau, Janina Pałęcka, editor of *Zwierciadło* (a periodical for – mainly – female readers), Maria Wojciechowska, secretary of the [Provincial-level] Council of Trade Unions, and Zofia Kica representing the Federation of Socialist Unions of Polish Youth (FSZMP).⁴⁷

In May 1980, a coordinating team headed by Minister Maria Milczarek⁴⁸ held a meeting. Its subject was details concerning the preparation of the press campaign, cultural programme, cooperation of the bloc of socialist countries, efforts to ensure Poland's active influence on the editing of the final document of the conference, preparation of agendas for the Polish delegation's bilateral meetings, in particular with remote countries, but also assessment of the activity of European centres critical of Poland.⁴⁹ M. Regent-Lechowicz, who participated in meetings of the third session of the IPC, offered her knowledge and experience.

46 H. J. Sokalski – diplomat and translator/interpreter, employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Poland's representative in numerous UN bodies, also deputy permanent representative of the PPR at the UN (1975–1980). *Kto jest kim w Polsce 1984. Informator biograficzny*, eds L. Becela [et al.], Wydawnictwo Interpress, Warszawa 1984, p. 896.

47 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Memo – decisions as regards the preparation for the UN conference in Copenhagen (May 1980), no page numbering.

48 M. Milczarek (1929–2011) – member of the KC PZPR (1975–1981), chair of the Executive Council of the Women's League (1968–1975), minister of administration, local economy and environmental protection (1976–79), minister of labour, wages and welfare (1979–1980), Member of Parliament (Sejm of the PPR), (1969–1980), president of the KRKP at the OK FJN (1968–1977); T. Młodawa, *Ludzie władzy...*, p. 396.

49 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Memo – decisions concerning the preparation for the UN conference in Copenhagen (May 1980), no page numbering.

She estimated that Copenhagen would be crucial in terms of socioeconomic progress in developing countries, apartheid issues and the situation of Palestinian women and refugees. She drew attention to the great activity and involvement of the American delegation already during the third session of the IPC, according to her aimed at creating an unofficial platform of contacts and establishing more personal relations between female American and Western European representatives on the one hand and important delegates from developing countries on the other. She also emphasised the not inconsiderable, especially political, role that the NGOs set to participate in the Forum could play. This was, in her view, already evident in the very atmosphere accompanying the IPC sessions, but also resulted from the nature of the amendments made to the preparatory documents by the UN Secretariat. She believed that the countries of Western Europe, with more or less conscious support from developing countries, would deviate from the arrangements and programme adopted at the 1975 conference in Mexico,⁵⁰ something perceived as negative by the bloc of socialist countries.

The Coordination Team met for the last time on 17 June 1980. H. Sokalski reported on conclusions the findings thus far and guidelines concerning the composition of the Polish delegation, as well as its acceptance of the themes of its official, merit-based speeches. This included issues concerning the role of women in education for peace and the implementation of the programme of the Decade for Women in Poland and on the international forum. He emphasised the initiatives undertaken by Poland, the issues related to the socialist camp's policy of the day towards Afghanistan and Palestine, as well as the situation of refugees. The members of the delegation were also acquainted with topical international issues and the bloc's peace initiatives, and were given an interpretation of the foreign policy pursued by the Polish People's Republic. The final organisational meeting took place in the building of the party's Central Committee on 3 July 1980. It was attended by circa 25 persons, who learnt about the international situation of the day, as well as the guidelines related to the country's policies on foreign affairs and religion. At the same

50 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Preparatory Committee of the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women, no page numbering.

time, M. Milczarek officially handed over the leadership of the delegation to E. Kempara.⁵¹

The position of the Polish governmental representation took into account the complexity of the political situation at that time, the interests of the socialist bloc, and the guidelines contained in the UN Declaration on Educating Societies in the Spirit of Peace. Poland was to become a promoter of the idea of peaceful education and the increased role of women and the family in this process.⁵² The conference was to be used to promote the notion of military relaxation and disarmament in Europe, also as a continuation of the dissemination of the achievements of the European Women's Meeting which had taken place in Warsaw on 6–11 May 1980 under the slogan 'Women against fascism – for peace'.⁵³ These subjects were ultimately in both in the Programme of Action for the Second Half of the Decade for Women and reporting documents from the conference.

In the guidelines, the delegation was also instructed to present the achievements of the Polish People's Republic in the area of social and professional activation of women and the country's support for pro-family policies, during the proceedings of both the First and Second Committee. Experts from domestic and international institutes and party and government departments worked on the preparation of official documents. In the report on Poland's implementation of the World Plan of Action thus far, issues related to the education policy and healthcare were presented, as well as the employment policy, including institutional support for women's professional advancement, while taking into account the state procreation policy supported by legislative changes in progress back then. A report was also drafted on the participation of women in the economic

51 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Memo concerning the meeting of the PPR delegation members for the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women in Copenhagen on 14-30 July 1980 (June 1980), no page numbering.

52 Apart from the countries that co-authored the draft resolution on the role of women in education for peace, the initiative was supported by 14 countries: Bangladesh, Ecuador, Grenada, Guinea, Jamaica, Kenya, The Comoros, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico, Mozambique, Tanzania, Togo, and Zambia.

53 The so-called Europe's Round Table organised by the WIDE. AAN, KC PZPR, XL/68, Decisions from the deliberation as to the concept and state of the PPR's preparation for the UN World Women Conference and the World Forum of women's organisations in Copenhagen in July 1980 (26 March 1980), no page numbering.

development of the Polish People's Republic and data and information were presented on the role of welfare institutions in the implementation of the programme for women and the family.⁵⁴

The complicated international situation, antagonisms between individual countries and the Cold War conflict hampered the debates in Copenhagen, influencing the position of capitalist countries, which tried to marginalise political aspects – in particular attempts at identifying Zionism with racism, apartheid policy, or the Palestinian conflict – concentrating on equality and social and welfare issues, thus referring to the experience of domestic women's movements. Developing countries, in turn, mainly emphasised development and aid aspects, in which they also saw an opportunity to develop positive political phenomena. As regards the countries of the Eastern bloc, they placed the main emphasis on security and disarmament, pointing out the important interdependencies between a lasting peace that provides opportunities for development and the improvement of the situation of women in the world. Many delegations equated the empowerment of women with the elimination of all forms of discrimination and social inequality, which was to be achieved by developing appropriate legislation. The Conference adopted two types of resolutions, a comprehensive Programme of Action for the Second Half

54 The list of subjects prepared for the Copenhagen conference: the impact of apartheid on the situation of women in the south of Africa and the participation of women in the struggle for peace and the strengthening of international security (responsible: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the KRKP), women's employment (MPPiSS), women's education (MNSzWiT and MOiW), women's health protection (MZiOS), preparation of information on the Family Council together with a proposal for a UN proclamation of the Year of the Family, analysis of the implementation of the tasks of the World Action Plan and organisation of a scientific conference on the "family and social policy for the family in socialist society", a bulletin entitled "Polish Women in the Family, at Work, Sport and Social Activities" organisation of the conference Round Table of Europe on the participation of women in the struggle for peace and activities related to education in the spirit of peace (KRKP), thematic bulletins (KRKP, MPPiSS, MOiW, MNSzWiT and MZiOS), a statistical newsletter entitled 'Women and the family in the Polish People's Republic' (Central Statistical Office), and multilingual editions of the periodicals "Polska and Rada Narodowa, Gospodarka, Administracja" devoted to themes concerning women (Wydawnictwo KRKP). AAN, KC PZPR, XL/68, Draft programme and timetable of preparation for the Decade for Women Conference in Copenhagen, no page numbering.

of the Decade⁵⁵ and about 50 resolutions on selected problems of the situation of women, among which the leading role was played by political resolutions, including those on education for peace, opposition to racism, the fight against apartheid, the situation of Palestinian women, women in Chile, South Africa and Namibia, Bolivia, El Salvador, Lebanon, as well as refugee women.

The Women's Forum, which took place alongside the Conference, was attended by several thousand (mainly female) participants. The proceedings took place in many working groups yet exclusively in English, unlike the plenary sessions that were interpreted, which was controversial among some of the participants who voiced their opposition. Members of the Polish delegation attributed the initiative to convene the Forum to Western countries and saw this as a plan to create additional pressure on the members of the official conference. The richer western countries were able to provide their own delegations with more numerous representation. The Americans, who sent the largest delegation, came with as many as 50 members. The meetings at the Forum were also less formal and thus the participants' speeches were bolder and not as diplomatic as those in the two main Commissions. In the course of the debates, more than once people left the meeting room, thus expressing an attitude of opposition to controversial positions. At the Forum, the voice of the Soviet dissident Natalia Malakhovskaya could be heard, for example, questioning the achievements of the countries of the socialist bloc in implementing gender equality policies,⁵⁶ and Palestinian women and Latin American representatives were also active. Apart from debates on the promoted subject of global peace, representatives of the Polish delegation took part in ones about the policy of women's employment and working conditions, household economics and maternity care, also presenting Polish legal solutions in those areas. Other recurring themes included racial tensions and 'sexual

55 The Programme of Action was adopted by the majority of 94 votes, with 22 abstentions (Western countries) and four countries against (USA, Australia, Israel, Canada).

56 M. Fulton, *Copenhagen – 'Mid-Decade World Conference on Women 1980'*, "Atlantis. A Women's Studies Journal" 1981, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 197–198. M. Jones, *Work in USSR slavery*, Forum 80, Copenhagen, 28 July 1980, p. 3; K. Mendrela, *Kobiety radzieckiego samizdatu we współczesnej kulturze rosyjskiej – skomplikowane drogi feministek drugiej fali*, „Kultury Wschodniosłowiańskie – Oblicza i Dialog” 2016, vol. 6, pp. 117–130.

slavery of women'. Also discussed was women's place in culture and aspects of policies for the elderly.⁵⁷

The Polish delegation largely succeeded in carrying out its plans. It took an unequivocal stance for decolonisation policy, condemning colonisation, racism and apartheid, and expressing solidarity with Palestinian and women of the south of Africa. The Poles also urged the pursuit of peace policy by means of disarmament and stopping the arms race to favour economic development, as evidenced by their preparation of a resolution on the role of women in education for peace. The Polish delegates also confirmed the country's ongoing readiness to implement equality policy yet linking its successful implementation with women's strong position in the family and society, as was to be guaranteed by the legislative changes in place. Additionally, Poland was one of the first signatories to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and gave its positive appraisal of the Programme of Action for the following half of the decade. The draft resolution on the role of women in education for peace was a reference to the UN Declaration on educating societies in the spirit of peace adopted in 1978, also on Poland's initiative. The resolution was met with interest as the first document of its kind presented at such a large international forum,⁵⁸ despite opposition from representatives of some capitalist countries. Poland was also granted what it had sought, i.e. one of the conference vice-presidency positions.⁵⁹

Summary

In a confidential report, the head of the Polish delegation E. Kempara stressed that the conference had focused the public's attention to problems faced by women, yet given the complicated international situation had not guarantee the putting into practice of all the postulates adopted. She stressed the effectiveness of the process of consolidation of the socialist bloc

57 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/70, Report on the participation in the world conference of NGOs FORUM 80 held in Copenhagen on 14–24 July 1980, no page numbering.

58 Z. Kamiński, *Z perspektywy połowy dekady. Rozmowa z dr Marią Regent-Lechowicz wiceministrem Sprawiedliwości*, „Życie Warszawy”, 23 VIII 1985, p. 6.

59 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/67, Report by the head of the Polish delegation on its participation in the Copenhagen conference (1980), no page numbering.

countries with the developing ones, which in her view forced the Western countries into defensive and in a number of issues even self-isolation.⁶⁰ This corresponds to the assessments made by representatives of the US delegation, as well as the conclusions presented by K. Ghodsee.⁶¹

By the 1970s, the Polish People's Republic had adopted legal solutions that at the time were still being postulated in the USA and Western Europe. They concerned the introduction of legislative regulations on universal medical care, including the right to abortion, the popularisation of educational programmes, as well as women's professional activity, allowing them, paradoxically in socialist Poland, to achieve economic independence (obviously under the conditions of the existing system). In the public space to this day there is a dispute about the ideological basis accompanying the introduction of these solutions, but the fact remains that they were a positive effect of the experience of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. Women's juggling full-time professional and home duties is most often regarded as a negative effect, but this is a problem that is primarily economic rather than systemic. Studies increasingly provide evidence of the positive aspects of some of the legislative solutions behind equality policies, as exemplified by research on women in communist Poland by Anna Wachowiak⁶²

60 AAN, KC PZPR, XL/68, Report by the head of the Polish delegation on its participation in the Copenhagen conference (1980), no page numbering.

61 K. Ghodsee, *Revisiting the United Nations decade for women...*, pp. 3–4.

62 She analysed the memories of Polish women related to the period of the Polish People's Republic dividing them into four age cohorts. Of particular relevance were primarily those of the first two groups of women born in the decades 1939–1949 and 1950–1959. In the interviews, respondents from the first group mainly stressed remembering having an opportunity for professional emancipation and education, as well as guaranteed welfare, which they considered an advancement when compared with the past generations of women. Not only did they not criticise the system but had a positive attitude towards communism, even despite being aware of the existing imperfections, such as low wages or juggling two full-time jobs, one being household chores. At the same time, the patriarchal family model remained deeply rooted in their consciousness. A. Wachowiak, *Kobiety jako matki i pracownice w okresie PRL i ich utopie w działaniu. Szkic do spojrzenia komparatystycznego w czterech kohortach wiekowych*, [in:] *Utopie kobiet. 100 lat praw wyborczych kobiet (1918–2018)*, eds K. Slany, et al., Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2019, pp. 175–185.

or interviews by Karolina Wasilewska.⁶³ Personal accounts also complete the picture. Irena Grudzińska-Gross recalled: 'when I came to the United States in the 1970s, it immediately struck me that women in Poland were treated more equally. My mother worked, she decided for herself, as did the mothers of her friends. In the States you could see that this change was only just taking place'.⁶⁴ In the Poland of the 1970s, a woman's right to education, medical care or professional freedom was not questioned. Polish women took such rights for granted.

Obviously, these positive effects of the legislative solutions introduced did not determine the full attainment of the objectives of a broadly defined equality policy in favour of women. However, this was the case in all countries, including Western Europe. The Cold War dispute discussed here and the political context of the time surrounding the Copenhagen conference undoubtedly had the effect of blurring the fundamental issues that continue to challenge the international women's movement today, as they did then. These include, first and foremost, the mentally and culturally prevailing patriarchal system present in the consciousness of both men and women, and the lack of systemic solutions leading to genuine gender equality, an aspect stressed by representatives of Western countries in 1980. But the importance of the influence of the political context, highlighted by women from socialist countries at the time, cannot be underestimated either.

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63 She interviewed pioneering Polish female IT specialists, who in the Polish People's Republic were constructing and programming first computers alongside men. As programmers and builders, they did not discriminated against in that sector. They worked in managerial positions, and enjoyed recognition home and abroad, although they obviously stressed that equality was not perfect in communist Poland, as it is not today, with juggling two full-time jobs at work and at home remaining a burden. K. Wasilewska, *Cyfrodziewczyny – pionierki polskiej informatyki*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2020.

64 P. Milewska, *Byliśmy drużyną uzbrojoną w pióra*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 11 IV 2020, p. 41.

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