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The Actions by the National Council of Polish Women Showing Solidarity with Fighting Vietnam in the Global Sixties

Akcje solidarnościowe Krajowej Rady Kobiet Polskich z walczącym Wietnamem w globalnych latach sześćdziesiątych

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The Actions by the National Council of Polish Women Showing Solidarity with Fighting Vietnam in the Global Sixties

The subject of the article presents the newest research on the involvement of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), an international organisation, whose members included Poland, in the anti-colonial policy and opposition to the US intervention in Vietnam during the Cold War in the Global Sixties. As members of international organisations and institutions and representatives of the Polish state, Polish activists supported women in other parts of the world. The article focuses on declarations and manifestations of solidarity with Vietnamese women and children as well as confirms the agency of and collaboration between representatives of the Polish and Vietnamese women's movements in a broader context of transnational cooperation within the WIDF. The source base mainly includes archived documents of the National Council of Polish Women, which from 1966 to 1983 was a cooperation platform that represented the interests of the Polish women's movement in regards to the international agenda.

Akcje solidarnościowe Krajowej Rady Kobiet Polskich z walczącym Wietnamem w globalnych latach sześćdziesiątych

Problematyka podjęta w artykule koresponduje z najnowszymi badaniami dotyczącymi zaangażowania Światowej Demokratycznej Federacji Kobiet (ŚDFK – międzynarodowej organizacji, której członkiem była także Polska) w politykę antykolonialną i sprzeciw wobec amerykańskiej interwencji w Wietnamie w okresie zimnej wojny, w globalnych latach sześćdziesiątych. Polskie działaczki, reprezentując PRL w międzynarodowych organizacjach i instytucjach, wspierały kobiety z innych części świata. Artykuł opisuje deklaracje i wyrazy solidarności tego środowiska wobec wietnamskich kobiet i dzieci, potwierdzając jednocześnie jego sprawczość i współpracę między przedstawicielkami polskiego i wietnamskiego ruchu kobiecego w szerszym kontekście współpracy transnarodowej w ramach ŚDFK. Jako podstawę źródłową wykorzystano głównie dokumenty archiwalne Krajowej Rady Kobiet Polskich, która w latach 1966–1983 reprezentowała interesy polskiego ruchu kobiet na forum międzynarodowym.

Introduction*

Transnational research makes it possible to grasp diverse and complex forms of interrelationships and linkages that take place globally between large social groups, such as social movements that develop their activities from the national level, over and above state structures in international space.¹ In subject literature on the nature of the involvement of various social groups in the People's Polish Republic in international solidarity with the Vietnamese nation, one can find analyses examining the activity of Polish youth,² as well as Catholic groups or those centred around the émigré monthly magazine "Kultura".³ In contrast, the topic of interactions and contacts that Polish social and political activists had with the transnational women's movement, and especially the so-called Third World, during the communist period is scarcely addressed by academic research.⁴

* In the title, I am referring to two interlinked notions: the *long sixties*, understood as a continuity from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, and the *global sixties*, placing that period on the intersection of dynamic transnational events that determined significant cultural and political changes in the first, second and third worlds in the 20th century. For more, see: *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building*, ed. C. Jian et al., Routledge, New York 2018, p. 1-9: <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315150918>> [accessed: 10 IX 2024].

- 1 M. Witkowska, *Podjęcie transnarodowe w badaniach nad procesami politycznymi zachodzącymi w Unii Europejskiej*, "Studia Politologiczne" 2013, vol. 27, p. 122.
- 2 J. Mark et al., "We Are with You, Vietnam". *Transnational Solidarities in Socialist Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia*, "Journal of Contemporary History" 2015, vol. 50, No. 3, p. 439-464.
- 3 I. Goddeeris, *Between Anti-Imperialism and Anti-Communism: Poland and International Solidarity with Vietnam*, [in:] *Protest in the Vietnam War Era*, ed. A. Sedlmaier, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022 (Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements), p. 113-139.
- 4 Cf. F. de Haan, *The Global Left-Feminist 1960s: From Copenhagen to Moscow and New York*, [in:] *The Routledge Handbook...*, p. 230-241; S. Kuźma-Markowska, A. Ignaciuk, *Family Planning Advice in State-Socialist Poland, 1950s-1980s: Local and Transnational Exchanges*, "Medical History" 2020, vol. 64, issue 2, p. 240-266; Y. Gradszkova, *The Women's International Democratic Federation, the Global South, and the Cold War. Defending the Rights of Women of the "Whole World"?*, Routledge, London 2021, p. 182; A. Mrozik, *Locally and Globally: Polish Communist Women Activists and Post-War Transnational Emancipation Efforts, and How to Write about Them Today*, [in:] *Transnational Feminism in Non-English Speaking Europe, c. 1960-1990*, ed. A. Andeweg, H. Kurvinen, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2024.

This gap in knowledge is a result of a number of factors where the most important is the perception that the manifestations of activity of representatives of state women's organisations of the time were a façade, which was determined by the undemocratic nature of the regime of the time.⁵ However, this assumption does not change the fact that Polish women did participate in transnational cooperation fora, which brought together delegates from the so-called first, second and third world countries, participating in the work of UN commissions, international congresses or the 1975–1985 Decade for Women.⁶ Even more, Polish women organised such fora themselves as was the case with WIDF's 19th meeting and session which took place in Warsaw in 1974, right before the first conference of the Decade for Women in Mexico. Polish women were perceived as

- 5 The so formulated approach of anti-communist researchers, who perceive the activity of women's socialist organisations *a priori* as a façade, at the same time claiming the right to recognise their attitude as the only, objective and true one, are criticised by Kristen Ghodsee and Agnieszka Mrozik, who stress that in such a way they reinforce Cold War-era stereotypes that may discourage researchers from going beyond the traditional patterns of analysis, which give supremacy primarily to testimonies of victims of communism rather than its beneficiaries. K. Ghodsee, A. Mrozik, *Authority, Authenticity, and the Epistemic Legacies of Cold War Area Studies: Some Reflections on Women's History and State Socialism in Eastern Europe*, "Aspasia. The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History" 2023, vol. 17, issue 1, p. 31–52.
- 6 M. Dajnowicz, *Obchody Międzynarodowego Roku Kobiet 1975 na Białostocczyźnie (na tle głównych kierunków działalności Ligi Kobiet w kraju i regionie)*, "Czasopismo Naukowe Instytutu Studiów Kobiety" 2017, nr 1 (2), p. 9–27; M. Grabowska, *Zerwana genealogia: działalność społeczna i polityczna kobiet po 1945 roku a współczesny polski ruch kobiecy*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Scholar", Warszawa 2018, p. 236–237; U. Sokołowska, *Międzynarodowy Rok Kobiet 1975 na łamach "Kobiety i Życia"*, "Czasopismo Naukowe Instytutu Studiów Kobiety" 2019, nr 2 (7), p. 94–108; A. Mrozik, *Architektki PRL. Komunistki, literatura i emancypacja kobiet w powojennej Polsce*, Lupa Obscura, Warszawa 2022, p. 12, 21, 104–105, 161; E. Chrobaczyńska-Plucińska, *The Polish Delegation at the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women. Copenhagen, 14–30 July 1980*, "Sprawy Międzynarodowe" 2022, t. 75, nr 1, p. 149–175; N. Jarska, *Women's Activism and State Policies during International Women's Year and the United Nations Decade for Women: A Comparative Perspective*, "Women's History Review" 2023, p. 1–7; eadem, *International Women's Year and Women's Activism: A Comparative Look at Poland and Spain*, "Women's History Review" 2023, p. 1–17.

active agents in the activities they undertook,⁷ but there is still little analysis to confirm that.

In my research, I verify the thesis that while being part of international organisations and institutions Polish women, who were social and political activists and who were representing the Polish state, were active in supporting women in other parts of the world. As an example, I point to the solidarity actions organised to help Vietnamese women and children. I rely on primary sources and archival materials which were previously unused in analyses. Their review allows me to answer the following questions: Who were these women? Based on what values and goals were the structures that united and mobilised them organised? What were the forms of their actions? Polish women's activism was significant, authentic and showed a sense of agency. By agency I mean the "ability to act not only on one's own behalf, but also 'for' others", the "interdependence between the willingness and ability to act and the available resources [...] where the will to take a given action is necessary, and therefore a sense and potential of agency and the means (resources) to realise it", and as agency embedded "in the community and manifested in the process of social interaction"⁸. Today, we tend to forget about the activities of the Polish women who were activists in the communist period because we are under influence of the national paradigm, whereas activists of the time embraced the internationalist imperative, which was an important part of the socialist agenda.

The National Council of Polish Women

Between 1966 and 1983, the international interests of the Polish women's movement were represented by the National Council of Polish Women (Polish: Krajowa Rada Kobiet Polskich, further: the Council)

7 In the available source literature, one can find the confirmation of the activity and agency of several Polish activists, such as Zofia Dembińska, Zofia Wasilkowska, Fryderyka Kalinowska, Eugenia Krassowska, Wanda Tycner, or Izolda Kowalska-Kiryłuk. See: F. de Haan, *The Global...*, p. 230–241; A. Mroziak, *Architektki...*; eadem, *Locally...*, p. 177–201; 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, vol. 33, p. 3–4.

8 M. Grabowska, *Zerwana...*, p. 106–107.

which was a formal platform for cooperation of the women's movement, established at the All-Poland Committee of the Front of National Unity (Polish: Ogólnopolski Komitet Frontu Jedności Narodu, further: OK FJN). In literature, there is little information on the Council and its place in the structure of the post-war women's movement.⁹ Most often, researchers focus on the Women's League (Polish: Liga Kobiet, further: the League), which from 1982¹⁰ also operated renamed as the Polish Women's League.¹¹ Importantly, during the period of its activity (1966–1983) the Council took over some competences of the League. This did not take place without controversy, at whose root was the growing independence of the League's decision-making, reluctantly accepted by the authorities and perceived as a sign of rebelliousness, combined with criticism and dissatisfaction it expressed towards the policy of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polish: Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, further: PZPR), which paradoxically confirmed the manifestations of decision-making autonomy existing within its structures. The League eventually accepted the reform of the structure of the women's movement, which led it to giving up of its factory units, despite their relative popularity. These changes thus deprived the League of the possibility to formally represent women's interests in the workplace, shifting its activities to the places where they lived.¹² However, since the League was a mass organisation, widely known, also internationally, with numerous contacts among counterpart organisations, and with extensive structures,

- 9 B. Nowak, *Serving Women and the State. The League of Women in Communist Poland*, doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, 2004: <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=osu1091553624&disposition=inline> [accessed: 4 IX 2024]; N. Jarska, *A Patriarchal Marriage? The Women's Movement and the Communist Party in Poland (1945–1989)*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny" (English-Language Edition) 2018, vol. 125, No. 2, p. 7–37.
- 10 M. Dajnowicz, *Liga Kobiet Polskich w okręgu łódzkim w latach 1982–1989. Główne kierunki działalności w świetle materiałów sprawozdawczych organizacji*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 2021, t. 53, nr 2, p. 145.
- 11 M. Dajnowicz et al., *Liga Kobiet w terenie. Działalność organizacji i realia jej funkcjonowania na szczeblu regionalnym i lokalnym w rzeczywistości Polski Ludowej (1945–1989)*, Wydawnictwo "DiG", Warszawa 2024.
- 12 For more, see: B. Nowak, *Serving...*, p. 219–234.

and membership of around 350 thousand in 1966 (when the Council was established), the authorities wanted to use its organisational potential, thus significantly linking the two entities.¹³

The Council's task was to coordinate, on a national level, the multifaceted activities of all institutions and women's organisations in Poland, which undoubtedly proved that the authorities perceived the role of women, and above all their activity in political and socio-economic life, as a desirable element of state policy, which, nonetheless, they wished to control.¹⁴ The substantive basis for the main objectives expressed in the Council's programme and plans of action were presented at its inaugural meeting on 16 April 1966¹⁵ and formally included

- 13 P. Skorut, *Front Jedności Narodu: od narodzin idei do upadku politycznego pozoru*, Attyka, Kraków 2015, p. 207. One should add that as regards the extension of the League's autonomy, a significant turn came as late as January 1981 on the wave of domestic political events, when a new amendment to its statutes re-equipped it with competences in organising circles at workplace. Increasingly frequent, although opposed by representatives of trade unions and farmers' clubs, were voices calling for returning to the pre-1966 solutions and making the League again the sole organisation to represent women's interests in Poland. The crisis deepened in 1982, when on the wave of a discussion concerning the structure of the women's movement, the League's activists questioned yet again the necessity of the Council's existence whose formal and legal structure dated back to July 1983, when the then president Eugenia Kempara notified the chairwomen of the Provincial Women's Councils of the end of the operation of the Front of National Unity, and so the Council. Today, due to the scarcity of publications on the subject, it is difficult on many occasions to define differences between the two entities in question and separate their structures. The Archive of Modern Records [Polish: Archiwum Akt Nowych, further: AAN], OK FJN, 183/967, Wybrane problemy społecznej i społecznej sytuacji kobiet w Polsce (Materiał informacyjny), no page numbering; ibidem, 183/968, Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium KRKP w dniu 2 III 1982 r., no page numbering; ibidem, Notatka w sprawie dalszej działalności Krajowej Rady Kobiet Polskich, 27 II 1982, no page numbering; ibidem, Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium KRKP w dniu 11 V 1982 r., no page numbering; AAN, OK FJN, 183/986, List pożegnalny Eugenii Kemparowej do przewodniczących WRK, 13 VII 1983, no page numbering. See also: K. Stańczak-Wislicz et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945–1989. Nowoczesność, równouprawnienie, komunizm*, Universitas, Kraków 2020, p. 83.
- 14 AAN, OK FJN, 183/988, Zadania Krajowej Rady Kobiet Polskich, no page numbering.
- 15 Ibidem, 183/952, Protokół z pierwszego posiedzenia Krajowej Rady Kobiet Polskich w dniu 16 IV 1966 r., no page numbering.

in the adopted Rules of Procedure.¹⁶ Priority tasks included: support for professional activity of women, improving economic well-being and organisation of households, cultural and educational work with children and young people, development of women's civic education and, which is my main interest, international activities. Council's international engagements were of course a spinoff of the official foreign policy of the Polish People's Republic. At its core was, first and foremost, the exchange of experiences in addressing problems faced by women, families and children, including, above all, work for peace as a transnational project and consequences of the Second World War trauma. Another aspect was widening the activities of the Polish's state beyond its borders. During this period and earlier¹⁷ international contacts of the Council included mainly those with countries of the socialist bloc, the so-called second world countries, but also with representatives of women's organisations in Western countries, the so-called first world countries, as well as, which was important for the formation of transnational women's movements, representatives of the so-called third world countries located in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Members of the Council, like those of the League before, cooperated with WIDF and numerous UN agencies, such as: the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) or the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This cooperation contributed to education, exchange of opinions, and understanding of different perspectives also those from different political systems.

To streamline the work of the Council various commissions and committees were set up. Their members included women specialists

16 *Regulamin Krajowej Rady Kobiet Polskich*, [in:] *Zbiór Dokumentów ruchu kobiecego*, Krajowa Rada Kobiet Polskich przy Ogólnopolskim Komitecie Frontu Jedności Narodu, Warszawa 1967, p. 5. See also: AAN, OK FJN, 183/952, *Regulamin Krajowej Rady Kobiet Polskich*, no page numbering; *ibidem*, *Program działania Krajowej Rady Kobiet Polskich w latach 1966/1967*, no page numbering.

17 Those relations were upheld up until the resumption of the League's activity just after the war, then the Councils, and following changes in the structure of the women's movement in the 1980s the League again. Examples and reports from the course of the League's activity were published in its press organ "Nasza Praca" ('Our Work'). For more, see: A. Mrozik, *Locally...*, p. 182–193.

in different fields who offered their expert knowledge and expertise.¹⁸ The Standing Advisory Committee to the UN Commission on the Status of Women,¹⁹ where Poland had been a member since 1951,²⁰ was also intended to facilitate international cooperation. The Committee's aim was to cooperate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in developing main principles of equality policy in Polish People's Republic, which would later be promoted at the UN to favour legal changes in the status of women in political, economic, social and cultural areas. Within the scope of its competences, the Committee was able to request assistance and cooperation from various actors, which influenced the streamlining and effectiveness of its activities.²¹

- 18 AAN, OK FJN, 183/952, Problematyka i metody działania Rad Kobiet. Materiały na plenarne posiedzenie Krajowej Rady Kobiet Polskich 9 II 1970, January 1970, no page numbering.
- 19 Its members were: Zofia Wasilkowska (chairwoman) and Zofia Dembińska, Maria Jakubowicz, Eugenia Krassowska, Maria Regent-Lechowicz, Krystyna Sieradzka, Czesława Sobierajska, Maria Stypułkowska, Barbara Tryfan, Krystyna Wrochno, and Krystyna Glinka. AAN, OK FJN, 183/989, Protokół z posiedzenia Komitetu Doradczego ds. Komisji Praw Kobiet ONZ odbytego w dn. 12 I 1968 r. z udziałem amb. K[azimierza] Dorosza – v-dyrektora Departamentu Organizacji Międzynarodowych, tow. S[tanisławy] Zawadeckiej – przewodniczącej KRKP i tow. K[rystyny] Gromkovej – sekretarza KRKP, no page numbering.
- 20 Initially a subcommission at the Human Rights Commission, the UN Commission of the Status of Women was founded on 21 VI 1946 by the Economic and Social Council in order to improve women's status and put the gender equality principle in practice, on which it was obliged to regularly report to the Council. For more, see: C. Hannan, A. Iiyambo, Ch. Brautigam, *A Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women*, UN Women Headquarters Office, New York 2019, p. 4–5: <<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2019/A-short-history-of-the-CSW-en.pdf>> [accessed: 17 III 2024]. Of most interest is the participation in the work of the then still Subcommission on the Status of Women, i.e. from as early as 1946, of Fryderyka Kalinowska, as one of its seven members, about whose participation Agnieszka Mrozik has written recently. For more, see: A. Mrozik, *Architektki...*, p. 163–192.
- 21 AAN, OK FJN, 183/989, Protokół z posiedzenia Komitetu Doradczego ds. Komisji Praw Kobiet ONZ odbytego w dn. 12 I 1968 r., no page numbering.

Women's International Democratic Federation

A firm denial of fascism, fight for peace²² and activities on behalf of women and children were at the heart of the establishment, at the International Congress of Women held in Paris on 29 November 1945, of the WIDF. It was the largest and perhaps most influential post-war women's organisation in the world,²³ whose activists developed transnational networks of interconnectedness. This initiative initially brought together some 800 women from 40 countries. By 1981 it included as many as 131 organisations in 116 countries around the world which were united by their willingness to cooperate.²⁴ They were convinced that the core values of the international women's movement were of universal nature, which would guarantee unrestricted transnational cooperation for emancipation and gender equality, which could not materialise in practice without peace guarantees. Polish women were also actively involved in this project. These were above all communist and socialist women activists,²⁵ who on the national level, became the architects²⁶ of the new state and new social relations.

- 22 One should agree with Magdalena Grabowska who suggests a review of the attitude towards the history of transnational women's movement and assuming that it began in the postwar period, with its main axis building a movement for peace, at the following stage seeking work-maternity balance, and then activity for the broadly understood development, with Polish women as an active part of the movement. Their exclusion and oblivion was triggered by the general trend expressed at a 1995 UN conference in Beijing, whose participants from post-socialist countries broke with their socialist predecessors. M. Grabowska, *Zerwana...*, p. 239.
- 23 F. de Haan, *The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda, and Contributions, 1945-1991*, [in:] *Women and Social Movements (WASI) Online Archive*, ed. T. Dublin, K. Kish Sklar, 2012, p. 1: <<http://alexanderstreet.com/products/women-and-social-movements-international>> [accessed: 10 IX 2024].
- 24 It is worth adding that the new approach to research on the WIDF's activity was initiated by Prof. Francisca de Haan, a historian from the Faculty of Gender Studies at the Central European University. F. de Haan, *The Vietnam Activities of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)*, [in:] *Protest in the Vietnam...*, p. 55-56.
- 25 Z. Wasilkowska, *Kobiety w walce o pokój*, "Życie Słowiańskie. Miesięcznik społeczno-polityczny" 1951, nr 3, p. 119-123.
- 26 A. Mroziak, *Architektki...*

In the first decades of its activity, WIDF organised six congresses: in Paris (1945), Budapest (1948), Copenhagen (1953), Vienna (1958), Moscow (1963), and Helsinki (1969). The topic of the Vietnam war, which was fought first by France and later by the US, was discussed in WIDF's publications. In Poland it was presented in "Nasza Praca" ('Our Work') which was a bulletin published by the League. This shows that already from the very early stage socialist organisations expressed their opposition to the imperial policies of colonial states.²⁷ At the last congress, participants' deliberations were dominated by the topic of the Vietnam war. Discussions were attended by representatives from Vietnamese organisations: the Women's Union for the Liberation of South Vietnam and the Women's Union of Vietnam, which was a formal organisation operating in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam²⁸.

In 1964 and 1965 meetings between representatives from the then NATO countries were held in The Hague, Paris and London. They focused on peace and disarmament policy. In October 1964 in Sofia,²⁹ at a WIDF Council session, the International Women's Committee for Solidarity with Women, Children and People of South Vietnam was established.³⁰ In 1968 representatives of the international women's movement met first in Rome at a seminar on women's participation in public life and second in Stockholm at the World Conference on Children's Issues.³¹ Women called for world peace and an immediate response to the dramatic situation of children in armed conflicts. While condemning the American aggression, they expressed their solidarity with the Vietnamese people, which was to take the form of concrete aid. In 1967, a call was also published in the newly established WIDF

27 Eadem, *Locally...*, p. 182.

28 AAN, OK FJN, 183/990, Depesza, no page numbering; F. de Haan, *The Vietnam...*, p. 52.

29 It was attended by circa 150 deputies and invited guests from approx. 60 countries of Africa (8), America (11), Asia (18), Europe (22), and Oceania (12). Accepted were also the Organisation of Nepalese Women and the Mexican Women's Union. M. Regent-Lechowicz, *25 lat Światowej Demokratycznej Federacji Kobiet*, Krajowa Rada Kobiet Polskich przy Ogólnopolskim Komitecie Frontu Jedności Narodu, Warszawa 1971, p. 51.

30 "Information Bulletin by WIDF" 1964, No. 3, p. 2-3.

31 M. Regent-Lechowicz, *25 lat...*, p. 52.

magazine “Women of the World.”³² A few years later, in 1971 a Polish woman, Wanda Tycner, became its editor-in-chief.³³

International activity of the Council to build understanding with Vietnam

The main idea and value that influenced the main directions of the international engagements of the Polish women’s movement, was the fight for peace. International contacts were established both locally, within the Eastern Bloc, as well as globally and transnationally. Between 1964 and 1969, with the war being waged in Vietnam, a great deal of attention was devoted to the need for international support and assistance for women and children, and the Vietnamese society at large. From 1966 on, the Council started to cooperate,³⁴ in this regard, with the Polish Committee for Solidarity with the Nations of Asia and Africa (Polish: Polski Komitet Solidarności z Narodami Azji i Afryki, in subject literature commonly known as PKSZNAiA),³⁵ which had been set up a year earlier. Its first general meeting was attended by Melania Mroczek-Szymańska who was the secretary-general of the League³⁶ while Maria Michejda who was a member of the Polish-African Friendship Society Board was a member of the Committee’s

32 The first UN seminar on the exercise of the children’s rights enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1959 was held in Poland in 1959. M. Regent-Lechowicz, *25 lat...*, p. 52–54.

33 A. Mrozik, *Wanda Tycner: Kobiety całego świata – rozmowa Agnieszki Mrozik z Wandą Tycner*, “Bez Dogmatu. Kwartalnik kulturalno-polityczny” 2018, nr 116: <<http://lewica.pl/?id=31942&tytul=Wanda-Tycner:-Kobiety-ca%B3ego-%B6wiata>> [accessed: 31 X 2024].

34 AAN, Polski Komitet Solidarności z Narodami Azji, Afryki i Ameryki Łacińskiej [further: PKSZNAiA], 1627/19, Plan pracy Polskiego Komitetu Solidarności z Narodami Azji i Afryki na rok 1967, sheet 8; ibidem, untitled document [Polish Solidarity Committee], chapter 3: Poparcie dla walczących narodów Azji i Afryki, sheet 17.

35 Since 1982, the Polish Committee for Solidarity with the Nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

36 AAN, PKSZNAAiAŁ, 1627/22, Stenogram z I-go Walnego Konstytucyjnego zebrania Polskiego Komitetu Solidarności z Narodami Afryki i Azji odbytego w Warszawie, dnia 21 VI 1965 r., sheet 6.

Bureau.³⁷ A number of proposals regarding the directions, nature and forms of assistance were presented at a meeting held in Berlin on 18–19 February 1967 by the International Committee for Solidarity with Vietnam, an organisation with which the Council also cooperated, due to its competence to represent Polish women's movement internationally. Janina Kubani-Fulińska,³⁸ who also attended the Berlin meeting, was this Committee's permanent representative. A call to the women of the world was then adopted. It took the form of some documents and a protest letter calling for an immediate ending of bombing. It was sent to the then president of the United States, Lyndon Baines Johnson. A letter was also sent to Vietnamese women,³⁹ expressing words of moral support for their "just and righteous aims", understanding of the pain and suffering of mothers, children and the elderly, and condemnation of American imperialism.⁴⁰ However, a reference was also made to the fight for freedom, national independence and peace. The US aggression was perceived as reminiscent of the recent Nazi crimes, as the memory of the war continued to play an important role in public thinking. Poland, in particular, strongly emphasised this rhetoric. Referring to the proximity of the war experience, it was building an understanding with Vietnam.⁴¹

- 37 Ibidem, 1627/19, untitled document [Polish Solidarity Committee], chapter 2: Sprawy organizacyjne, władze, aparat wykonawczy, sheet 15; ibidem, 1627/22, Lista członków PKSZNAAiA, sheet 28.
- 38 Janina Kubani-Fulińska (*1916) – an MP in the third legislative term of the Sejm, member of the General Committee of the United People's Party, vice-chair of the Executive Board of the League. Sejm Library: *Kubani Janina*, „Biblioteka Sejmowa” [online, accessed: 8 IX 2024]: <https://bs.sejm.gov.pl/F?func=direct&local_base=ARS10&doc_number=000004849>.
- 39 AAN, OK FJN, 183/988, Kontakty zagraniczne kobiet polskich 1967, no page numbering. Cf. also: M. Regent-Lechowicz, *25 lat...*, p. 57.
- 40 AAN, PKSZNAAiAŁ, 1627/23, Uchwała Walnego Zebrania Polskiego Komitetu Solidarności z Narodami Azji i Afryki, no page numbering.
- 41 In the period of the Polish People's Republic, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was the main beneficiary of gratuitous military assistance, which in the period 1965–1975 amounted to approx. PLN 5.6 billion (USD 70 million). For more, see: P. Gasztold, *Towarzysze bez broni. Tak PRL pomagała bratnim armiom: od Wietnamu po RPA*, "Polityka", 24 I 2023, nr 4, p. 71–73; idem, *Propaganda i pomoc dla Trzeciego Świata: działalność Polskiego Komitetu Solidarności z Narodami Azji, Afryki i Ameryki Łacińskiej, 1965–1990*, "Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały" 2023, nr 21, p. 103–104. See also: A. Mroziak, *Locally...*, p. 192, 195, 197–198.

The second meeting of the International Solidarity Committee which was held in Berlin in March 1968 was attended by representatives of Vietnamese women, who gave harrowing testimonies to the war. The meeting provided an opportunity to report on the protests and acts of solidarity organised by women's movement activists in various countries around the world. A month later, in April 1968, a conference was held in Paris. It was participated by the Solidarity Committee. The main topic of the conference was preparation of proposals for peace regulations and an end to the Vietnam war.⁴²

A year later, on 14–18 June 1969, WIDF's 6th Congress was held in Helsinki. The main topic of discussions at this gathering was the situation of women and children in the face of the ongoing war in Vietnam, which was also directly discussed by representatives of the Vietnamese delegation Nguyen Thi Chon (South Vietnam) and Phan Thi An (DRV). The Congress was also attended by an eight-member delegation of Polish women, led by Maria Milczarek,⁴³ who was the president of the Council and the League's Board as well as a member of the Congress's Bureau. On 15 June 1969, five committees discussed specific women's problems. The committee on solidarity with Vietnamese women and children, which was attended by a Polish delegate, a well-known journalist and writer Monika Warneńska,⁴⁴ two initiatives were put forward: a campaign to end the war and a project to build and equip a paediatric hospital in the DRV. Warneńska was the communist daily's "Trybuna Ludu" war correspondent in Vietnam from 1964 to 1975. In 1965, she was in Vietcong-controlled areas and Vietnam became her second home, which explained her knowledge and

42 M. Regent-Lechowicz, *25 lat...*, p. 57.

43 Maria Milczarek – an educator, historian, social and political activist, member of the Central Committee of the PZPR, an MP in the fifth to seventh legislative terms of the Sejm. Minister of administration, regional economy and environmental protection (1976–1979), minister of labour, wages and social affairs (1979–1980). In the period 1968–1977, chair of the Council, member of the WIDE. Creator of programme and organisational activities of the Polish women's movement, initiator of a number of actions for peace and security in the international women's movement. AAN, Komitet Centralny Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej [further: KC PZPR], XL/35, Biogram, no page numbering.

44 One of the first female journalists, she conducted interviews with captive American soldiers. Cf. I. Goddeeris, *Between...*, p. 117.

expertise in the discussions as well as serves as evidence that she was not an accidental member of the delegation.⁴⁵ In the face of repeated assertions about the merely façade nature of women's state activism in the communist period, this constitutes an important proof of agency. In addition, Poland's representation in the Women in the Family Committee included: Janina Kubani-Fulińska and Weronika Jackowska⁴⁶ while Irena Sroczyńska⁴⁷ and Marianna Sołtyszewska⁴⁸ participated in the works of the Women and Work Committee while Kamilla Mrozowska⁴⁹ was engaged in the Women in Society Committee. Maria Milczarek and Maria Regent-Lechowicz⁵⁰ were a part of the largest of the committees, "Women in the fight to gain and defend independence, democracy and peace." On 18 June, a one-day WIDF Congress devoted to organisational matters also took place. Hertta Kuusinen from Finland was elected its chairwoman while Cecile Hugel

- 45 For more, see: *Monika Warnęska*, "Relacje Biograficzne. Wspomnienia świadków historii XX wieku" [online, accessed: 23 v 2024]: <<https://relacjebiograficzne.pl/demo/audio/351-monika-warnenska>>. The activity of Monika Warnęska for Vietnam, including women, is extensively analysed by Agnieszka Mroziak in her upcoming article whose first version I was able to read thanks to the author's kindness.
- 46 Weronika Jackowska (*1922) – a member of the Polish United Workers' Party, the Council, the Commission for Working Women at the Central Trade Unions Council, Supreme Cooperative Board, Bureau of the Executive Board of the Free University Association, secretary of the Executive Board of the League (1970–1974). AAN, KC PZPR, XL/56, Zarząd Główny Ligi Kobiet, no page numbering.
- 47 Irena Sroczyńska (1925–2001) – an MP in the fourth to eighth legislative terms of the Sejm, member of the Polish Workers' Party, later the PZPR, vice-chair of the Council, secretary of the Central Trade Unions Council. AAN, KC PZPR, XL/91, Notatki informacyjne, no page numbering.
- 48 Marianna Sołtyszewska (1927–2019) – an MP in the third legislative term of the Sejm, a member of the PZPR and the Executive Board of the League, chair of the Sztuka Łowicka Folk and Artisanal Industry Cooperative (1953–1993), chair of the Supervisory Board of Cepelia. AAN, KC PZPR, XL/56, Zarząd Główny Ligi Kobiet, no page numbering.
- 49 Kamilla Mrozowska (1917–2002) – non-attached, the Council member, historian of education, Jagiellonian University professor, Home Army soldier, director of the Jagiellonian University's Institute of Pedagogy (1971–1977). For more, see: K. Bartnicka, *Kamilla Mrozowska (28 I 1917 – 2 v 2002)*, "Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty" 2002, t. 41, p. 3–5; AAN, KC PZPR, XL/35, Krajowa Rada Kobiet Polskich, January 1974, no page numbering.
- 50 M. Regent-Lechowicz, *25 lat...*, p. 58, 60–62.

was chosen as a secretary. Polish women were also members of the newly elected Council of the Federation. They included: Maria Milczarek, Irena Sroczyńska and Janina Kubani-Fulińska, while Irena Strzelecka⁵¹, Monika Warneńska⁵² and Krystyna Gromkova⁵³ were elected as alternate members, which allowed them access to direct information and offered opportunities to develop closer contacts.

Council's representatives also participated in a conference which focused on security in Europe and which was organised in Ystad in 1970. They also took part in an international seminar titled "Problems of peace and security in Europe and the participation of political and social organisations in the fight for peace" which was held a year later in Moscow.⁵⁴ The signing of the Paris Peace Accords on 27 January 1973,⁵⁵ on the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam, did not bring immediate effects, resulting, among other things, in a meeting in January 1974 between the first secretary of the DRV Embassy in Poland, Nguyen Tan, and the Council's representative on the Polish side. Tan's visit was informational and consultative in nature. It involved issuing of official communiqués and expressions of solidarity in the face of US's failure to implement certain peace decisions.⁵⁶ The 19th meeting of the Bureau and the session of the Polish

- 51 Irena Strzelecka (1920–2005) – an economist, active in the cooperative movement, a member of Youth Organisation of the Workers' University Union, Polish Scouting Association, Women's Military Training, People's Army liaison, she fought in the Warsaw Uprising, distinguished with a Silver Cross of the Order of Virtuti Militari. After the war, director of the Warsaw branch of the Union of Food Cooperatives, deputy minister at the Ministry of State Control, in 1958–1972 president of the Społem Union of Food Cooperatives in Warsaw. D. Gierycz, *Setna rocznica urodzin Ireny Strzeleckiej*, "Społemowiec Warszawski" 2020, nr 2, p. 4.
- 52 Monika Warneńska (1922–2010) – a Polish writer, reporter and war correspondent in Vietnam in 1964–1975. Published in "Trybuna Ludu" and the "Perspektywy" weekly (1973–1990). For more, see: *Monika Warneńska...*; A. Mrozik, *Bringing...*
- 53 Krystyna Gromkova (*1924) – a member of the PZPR, secretary of the OK FJN and the Council. AAN, KC PZPR, XL/35, Krajowa Rada Kobiet Polskich, January 1974, no page numbering.
- 54 Ibidem, OK FJN, 183/1003, Działalność międzynarodowa KRKP w latach 1966–1982, 1982, no page numbering.
- 55 I. Goddeeris, *Between...*, p. 120.
- 56 AAN, OK FJN, 183/995, Notatka do przewodniczącej KRKP Marii Milczarek, Orędzie ŚDFK z okazji Międzynarodowego Dnia Kobiet 1974 – o prawa kobiet, szczęście dzieci, pokój, niepodległość i postęp społeczny, 8 III 1974, no page numbering.

Women's Congress, which took place in Warsaw from 20 to 23 May 1974, were a continuation of activities that were aimed at supporting the accords and at the same time evidence of Polish women's involvement in international activities. It could also be treated as evidence of their organisational skills and the trust they enjoyed from other international activists. Thus, representatives of 110 women's organisations from 97 countries, including delegates of various UN agencies, around 300 people from all continents, announced their participation. Nguen Thi Dinh, the president of the South Vietnamese Women's Union, was among the attendees. Deliberations took place in the building of the Polish Parliament. Main discussions focused on the development and final approval of the programme of the International Year of Women – 1975. However, two resolutions concerning the situation in Vietnam and more broadly in the Middle East were also introduced. They called for further action to restore peace in that part of the world.⁵⁷

By 1975, a delegation from the Council had participated in three international conferences/seminars focused on peace and disarmament in the world: "Women of the world in the fight for peace and disarmament and its social consequences" (New York), "Women in the fight against fascism for a sustainable and just world peace" (Minsk) and "Women's participation in the process of consolidating peace, détente and cooperation" (Bochum).⁵⁸ There were also repeated press releases and statements condemning American intervention, and above all bombing,⁵⁹ as well as letters to Vietnamese women expressing moral and material solidarity with them⁶⁰ and various commemorative and anniversary

57 Ibidem, 183/1020, Wywiad z przewodniczącą, no page numbering.

58 Ibidem, 183/1003, Działalność międzynarodowa KRKP w latach 1966–1982, 1982, no page numbering.

59 Ibidem, 183/993, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP K[rystyny] Gromkowej do Polskiej Agencji Prasowej Redakcji Biuletynu Krajowego, 6 I 1972; ibidem, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP K[rystyny] Gromkowej do Polskiej Agencji Prasowej Redakcja Wiadomości Krajowych, 22 VIII 1972, no page numbering; AAN, OK FJN, 183/995, Notatka Jadwigi Torbus do Marii Milczarek, przewodniczącej KRKP, 23 I 1974, no page numbering.

60 In the letter, attention is drawn to the appeal of Polish intellectuals to scholars and creators in the US, also signed by Polish women. AAN, OK FJN, 183/993, List protestacyjny KRKP do kobiet Wietnamu, 18 VIII 1972, no page numbering.

wishes,⁶¹ including, in the later period, expressions of joy with the end of the war.⁶² Polish women, therefore, were not only formally present at transnational fora, but actively participated both in the organisation of such meetings and in the debates, which resulted in actions for peaceful solutions for Vietnam, among other things.

Solidarity actions with Vietnam organised by the Council

One of the largest solidarity actions coordinated by the Council in accordance with its statute – and inaugurated by WIDF⁶³ – which engaged all Polish women's groups, was sewing⁶⁴ clothes for Vietnamese children. It was called "The Gift of the Heart" and symbolically initiated on 8 March 1970, that is the Women's Day. Implemented in the local communities of women activists, workplaces, schools or private individuals,⁶⁵ this action was in principle based on volunteer work. Clothes were to be donated to the Vietnamese Women's Union on the occasion of the International Children's Day. As a result of the cooperation between the Provincial Committee of the Front of National Unity and the Provincial Women's Council in Gdańsk, a central collection point for donations was set up between 20 May and 10 June 1970,

61 Ibidem, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP K[rystyny] Gromkowej do Ambasady Republiki Wietnamu Południowego, 20 XII 1972, no page numbering; AAN, OK FJN, 1983/994, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP K[rystyny] Gromkowej do Ambasady Republiki Wietnamu Południowego w Polsce, 19 XII 1973, no page numbering; ibidem, 183/1001, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP K[rystyny] Gromkowej do PAP Redakcji Biuletynu Krajowego, 28 X 1980, no page numbering.

62 Ibidem, 183/994, List Prezydium KRKP do Związku Kobiet Wietnamskich w Hanoi, 1 II 1973, no page numbering; ibidem, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP K[rystyny] Gromkowej do PAP Redakcja Biuletynu Krajowego, 1 II 1973, no page numbering.

63 AAN, OK FJN, 183/991, Pismo sekretarza OK FJN Edwarda Milczarka do Jana Skrzypczaka, z-cy Kierownika Wydziału Propagandy i Agitacji KC PZPR, 22 V 1970, no page numbering.

64 In the Council documents, the importance of the individual involvement in preparing gifts is stressed, which does not correspond with another premise that aid for the countries of the Global South included "various articles, redundant for us." Cf. P. Gasztold, *Towarzysze...*

65 AAN, OK FJN, 183/991, Z uchwały Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Kobiet przy Wojewódzkim Komitecie Frontu Jedności Narodu w Gdańsku w sprawie zakończenia akcji "Daru Serca" w województwie gdańskim, no page numbering.

with the Foreign Goods Warehousing Company⁶⁶ responsible for sending them to Hanoi. The Committee of Solidarity with Vietnam was responsible for issuing orders and financing the transport of donations.⁶⁷ The Polish Red Cross also provided expertise in completing this action at the national level. At the same time, at the Central Council of Trade Unions money was collected to be paid to Aid Fund for Vietnam account.⁶⁸ The final event of the “Gift of the Heart” campaign was planned for 1 June 1970 in Gdańsk. The initiative also provided an opportunity to establish closer relations with the Vietnamese community living in Poland as well as with Poles who had been to Vietnam.⁶⁹ A commemorative stamp of solidarity with Vietnamese women was prepared and given to women’s organisations to distribute among their participants. Awarded activists met on 18 May in Gdańsk.⁷⁰ This initiative was also covered by local and national press,⁷¹ which was in accordance with the priority objectives of the WIDF’s solidarity

- 66 Ibidem, Pismo Jadwigi Borowskiej przedstawicielki WRK przy WK FJN w Gdańsku, adresowane do KRKP, 10 IV 1970 no page numbering. The letter contains detailed comments on transport.
- 67 Ibidem, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP Krystyny Gromkowej, adresowane do Ludwika Matusiak, Sekretarz Komisji d/s Kobiet Pracujących CRZZ, 19 III 1970, no page numbering; ibidem, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP Krystyny Gromkowej, adresowane do M[arii] Milczarek, 15 IV 1970, no page numbering; ibidem, Pismo Sekretarz K[rystyny] Gromkowej do Wojewódzkiej Rady Kobiet (wszystkie), Z[arządu] G[łównego] Ligi Kobiet, Krajowego Wydziału Spółdzielczyń, Rady Głównej K[ola] G[ospodyń] W[iejskich] oraz Komisji Kobiet Pracujących C[entralnej] R[ady] Z[wiązków] Z[a-wodowych], 22 IV 1970, no page numbering.
- 68 Ibidem, Pismo Sekretarz K[rystyny] Gromkowej do Wojewódzkiej Rady Kobiet (wszystkie), Z[arządu] G[łównego] Ligi Kobiet, Krajowego Wydziału Spółdzielczyń, Rady Głównej K[ola] G[ospodyń] W[iejskich] oraz Komisji Kobiet Pracujących C[entralnej] R[ady] Z[wiązków] Z[a-wodowych], 8 v 1970, no page numbering.
- 69 T. L. Nguyễn Vũ, *A World of Their Own: Vietnamese Students in Late Socialist Poland*, [in:] *Rethinking Socialist Space in the Twentieth Century*, ed. M. Colla, P. Betts, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2024 (St Antony’s Series): <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-54581-8_8> [accessed: 8 IX 2024].
- 70 AAN, OK FJN, 183/991, Środowiska Kobiety i Liga Kobiet w woj. gdańskim, 8 v 1970, no page numbering.
- 71 Ibidem, Informacja o sposobie zakończenia akcji szycia ubranek dla dzieci wietnamskich – zwanej “Dar Serca” 8 marca – 1 czerwca 1970 r., 8 v 1970, no page numbering; *Dar serca dla dzieci Wietnamu*, “Ekspres Wieczorny”, 11 VI 1970; *Dary polskich kobiet dla dzieci wietnamskich*, “Trybuna Ludu”, 11 VI 1970; *Cenne efekty akcji “Dar serca”*, “Życie Warszawy”, 11 VI 1970, no page numbering.

action. They included: spreading of information, exchange of ideas and giving a voice to those in need.⁷² At activists' meetings, films about the plight of Vietnamese women and children were thus screened.⁷³ The transfer of donations was also accompanied by official meetings between representatives of the Polish women's movement and of the embassies of the DRV and the Republic of South Vietnam. On 6 June 1970, in the Coat of Arms Hall of the Provincial National Council in Gdańsk, a meeting summarising and concluding the "Gift of the Heart" campaign was attended by around 100 people.⁷⁴ It was accompanied by a cultural programme, with the participation of young people from schools in the Tricity and actors from the Wybrzeże Theatre who performed a play titled *Vietnam*.⁷⁵ In less than three months, around 400 thousand items of children's clothes were collected and sent to both Vietnamese states.⁷⁶

Alongside the "Gift of the Heart" campaign, which was a response to the WIDF's Helsinki call, the Council collected funds to build and equip

72 K. McGregor, *Opposing Colonialism: The Women's International Democratic Federation and Decolonisation Struggles in Vietnam and Algeria 1945-1965*, "Women's History Review" 2016, vol. 25, issue 6, p. 925-944.

73 AAN, OK FJN, 183/991, Z uchwały Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Kobiet przy Wojewódzkim Komitecie Frontu Jedności Narodu w Gdańsku w sprawie zakończenia akcji "Daru Serca" w województwie gdańskim, no page numbering.

74 30 female activists from Gdańsk Voivodeship, 5 from Koszalin, Olsztyn and Bydgoszcz Voivodeships each and 2 from the other voivodeships each, additionally 2 representatives per each of central instances of women's circles and the League, members of the Council Bureau and representatives of the press ("Głos Wybrzeża"), radio and TV. Official representatives: Irena Strzelecka, vice-chair of the Council, Krystyna Gromkova, the Council secretary, ambassador of Southern Vietnam Tran-Wan-Tu, first secretary of the DRV Embassy Wu-Bach-Mai, secretary of the PZPR Voivodeship Committee Jan Hajer, MP and chair of the Voivodeship Committee of the Front of National Unity Florian Wichłacz. Representatives of the executive: Working Women's Committee at the Central Trade Unions Council, National Department of Women in Cooperatives, Executive Board of the Country Housewives' Association, Executive Board of the League, and Provincial Women's Councils. AAN, OK FJN, 183/991, Pismo sekretarza OK FJN Edwarda Milczarka do Jana Skrzypczaka, z-cy Kierownika Wydziału Propagandy i Agitacji KC PZPR, 22 V 1970, no page numbering; ibidem, Program spotkania KRKP z przedstawicielkami Ambasad z Wietnamu w Gdańsku w dniu 6 VI 1970 r., 6 VI 1970, no page numbering.

75 Ibidem, Program spotkania, 6 VI 1970, no page numbering.

76 M. Regent-Lechowicz, *25 lat...*, p. 70.

a gynaecological and paediatric ward at a hospital in Hanoi. Approximately three million Polish zloty was raised.⁷⁷ The decision to build a hospital made by the WIDF, inspired by the needs and suggestions of the Vietnamese Women's Union, was presented to the World Congress of Women in Helsinki in 1969. The hospital was not built from scratch, but rebuilt and modernised, and supplied with new medical equipment.⁷⁸ In 1973, a working meeting was held in Havana between the WIDF Office and representatives of the DRV Women's Union and the South Vietnamese Women's Liberation Union. During this gathering preliminary plans were agreed on. At the time, the costs of the investment were esteemed at 4 million roubles. Half came from the donations collected by the Committee of Soviet Women, chaired by the first woman cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, who was also WIDF's vice-president.⁷⁹ The hospital was envisioned as a complex of buildings with a total size of 23,765 square meters, spread over an area of 2.5 hectares. It was to include an observation ward, an obstetrics and gynaecology ward and operating theatre, as well as a delivery ward and a sterilisation ward. It was also planned to have administrative offices, a laboratory, a pharmacy, an X-ray room and a physiotherapy department.⁸⁰ The official opening of the hospital was planned for 1975.⁸¹ This turned out to be impossible, and 21 November 1979 proved to be more realistic.⁸²

In April 1976, in a letter to the deputy prime minister Tadeusz Wrzaszczyk⁸³ Maria Milczarek, on behalf of the Council's Bureau, after having

77 Y. Gradszkova, *The Women's...*, p. 181–182.

78 F. de Haan, *The Vietnam...*, p. 74.

79 AAN, OK FJN, 183/994, Pismo Sekretarz Generalnej WIDF F[anny] Edelman, 20 VII 1973, no page numbering.

80 Ibidem, Pismo Sekretarz Generalnej WIDF F[anny] Edelman, 24 IX 1973, no page numbering.

81 Ibidem, Pismo Sekretarz Generalnej WIDF F[anny] Edelman, 20 VII 1973, no page numbering.

82 F. de Haan, *The Vietnam...*, p. 76.

83 Tadeusz Wrzaszczyk (1932–2002) – in 1975–1980 deputy prime minister and chairman of the Planning Commission at the Council of Ministers, as well as a substitute member of the Political Bureau of the PZPR's Central Committee, MP in the seventh and eighth legislative terms of the Sejm. In 1980, he handed in his resignation; dismissed from the PZPR's Central Committee, and in 1981 from the Party itself. Interned during martial law. Cf. T. Mołdawa, *Ludzie władzy 1944–1991*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1991, p. 443.

obtained an initial verbal permission requested⁸⁴ funds for medical and vocational rehabilitation centres for women disabled by the war in Vietnam, as requested by the Vietnamese Women's Committee in the Government Aid Programme for Vietnam. These centres were to teach women such skills as printing, photography, carpentry, tailoring and typing. It was also planned to launch a culture club, which would include a television, a tape recorder, musical instruments such as a piano, an accordion, a violin or a guitar, a film projector and a camera, a sewing machine, a typewriter and kitchen equipment.⁸⁵ This aid, estimated at 1 million Polish zloty, was handed over to the Vietnamese Women's Union in December 1977.⁸⁶ It was requested that funds be secured to equip two workshops: one for repairing radio and television equipment, and the second one for embroidery and lace making.⁸⁷ Between 1978 and 1979, the Council additionally donated 75 tonnes of food to Vietnam, mainly noodles and powdered milk, 1 vehicle – fiat combi (195,000 Polish zloty), 5 typewriters with French font (36,000 Polish zloty) and children's clothes (over 100,000 Polish zloty).⁸⁸

In the second half of the 1970s, various forms of assistance were also part of the implementation of the tasks adopted at the conference to mark the UN's proclamation of International Women's Year, which was held in Mexico in 1975, when the UN Decade for Women was also pro-

84 AAN, OK FJN, 183/997, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP K[rystyny] Gromkowej do Mirosławy Wąsowicz, Podsekretarz Stanu w Ministerstwie Przemysłu Lekkiego, 7 X 1976, no page numbering.

85 Ibidem, Pismo przewodniczącej KRKP M[arii] Milczarek do Wiceprzewodniczącego Rady Ministrów, Przewodniczącego Komisji Planowania przy Radzie Ministrów Towarzysza Tadeusza Wrzaszczyka, 14 IV 1976, no page numbering.

86 AAN, OK FJN, 183/999, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP K[rystyny] Gromkowej do Departamentu Międzynarodowych Organizacji w Ministerstwie Spraw Zagranicznych, 15 VIII 1978, no page numbering.

87 Ibidem, 183/997, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP K[rystyny] Gromkowej do Zdzisławy Czyżowskiej, Dyrektor Zespołu Planowania Społecznego, 29 IX 1976, no page numbering; ibidem, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP K[rystyny] Gromkowej do Ambasady Socjalistycznej Republiki Wietnamu, 14 IV 1977, no page numbering.

88 AAN, OK FJN, 183/1017, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP K[rystyny] Gromkowej do Komisji Planowania przy Radzie Ministrów, Zespołu Współpracy Gospodarczej z zagranicą, Sekretariatu Wietnamskiego, 10 XII 1979, no page numbering.

claimed⁸⁹. The WIDF published various information materials that promoted political, moral and material solidarity campaigns. They emphasised involvement of individual national organisations. WIDF expected systematic and detailed data from its members.⁹⁰ Representatives of the Polish national women's movement organised aid and sent it to other countries: Laos (powdered milk, noodles), Guinea (sewing machines), Angola (typewriters), Chile (children's clothes), Palestine (clothes and toys for a bazaar organised for Palestinian refugees) or Afghanistan (sewing machines, children's clothes). This aid also included covering travel costs and participation of women from the Global South in international congresses in Helsinki, Berlin, Moscow and other international meetings that WIDF held in Europe.⁹¹ WIDF also acted as an intermediary in organising post-war tours for Vietnamese women to countries with which it cooperated through its representatives. Polish women's movement activists also invited Vietnamese women to Poland. This undertaking was financed with funds from the Aid Fund for Vietnam.⁹² Among others, an official delegation from the Vietnamese Women's Union was invited to Poland in April 1978 to get familiar with the Polish women's movement and solidarity-inspired activities of the Council.⁹³ Similarly to representatives from other socialist countries, for example Bulgaria,⁹⁴ Polish women participated in transnational contacts with the countries of the Global South, building international networks of cooperation.

89 Ibidem, 183/999, Pismo Sekretarz KRKP K[rystyny] Gromkovej do Departamentu Międzynarodowych Organizacji w Ministerstwie Spraw Zagranicznych, 15 VIII 1978, no page numbering.

90 Ibidem, 183/994, Pismo Sekretarz Generalnej WIDF F[anny] Edelman, 20 VII 1973, no page numbering.

91 Ibidem, 183/1001, Odpowiedzi na kwestionariusz ONZ, 27 III 1980, no page numbering; ibidem, 183/1003, Działalność międzynarodowa KRKP w latach 1966–1982, 1982, no page numbering.

92 AAN, OK FJN, 183/994, Pismo przewodniczącej M[arii] Milczarek do Ryszarda Pospieszyńskiego, Sekretarza Centralnej Rady Związków Zawodowych, 13 III 1973, no page numbering.

93 Ibidem, 183/999, Realizacja planu wymiany zagranicznej Krajowej Rady Kobiet Polskich Ligi Kobiet w 1978, 22 XII 1978, no page numbering.

94 K. Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War*, Duke University Press, Durham 2019.

Conclusions

War confronts the international community with the need to take actions in face of ongoing conflicts and offer moral, humanitarian or, as a last resort, military support to defend the weakest members of the society, children, women, or the elderly. This often requires fostering international and transnational cooperation among societies that are not indifferent to the tragedy of people who are affected by the conflict. Organisations that have the potential to build effective international agendas and become a platform for cooperation, making it effective at the same time, play an important role in this transnational activism. Today, the topic of the agency of the activists and politicians – and their efforts – from international organisations such as WIDE, which was able to unite representatives of state feminism,⁹⁵ both from the countries of the Global North and the Global South, are of growing interest to researchers. From the very beginning of WIDE's establishment, Polish women were active members of this forum. Available research shows and documents their involvement in various international fora, pursuing major emancipatory concepts, equality and peace demands, supporting aspirations of post-colonial societies in the Global South.

International solidarity and aid actions were an inherent part of this activity. They took diverse forms, supporting pro-independence demands of the Vietnamese people, where Polish women were also involved. Their assistance included, above all, support for housekeeping, childcare or organising advanced health services. On the other hand, they also provided aid for education, supported women war veterans and the exchange of mutual experiences through direct contacts, exchanges of delegations to both Poland and Vietnam. All of these forms of aid fell within the socialist agenda, focusing on its women's aspects.

Today, due to the undemocratic nature of the people's democracy systems of the time, some researchers question and *a priori* depreciate this

95 Present in source literature, the term signifies an emancipatory and modernisation programme centrally implemented by the state, yet not excluding taking grassroots initiatives and actions. Cf. Z. Wang, "State Feminism"? *Gender and Socialist State Formation in Maoist China*, "Feminist Studies" 2005, vol. 31, No. 3, p. 519–551; A. Mroziak, *Architektki...*, p. 16–17.

output and the agency of representatives of state feminism. Today it would also be difficult to point to a similar formalised, institutionalised, transnational women's organisation that could unite representatives of national women's organisations from all over the world as WIDF did in its efforts to organise protests and solidarity aid actions for the most vulnerable and needy. This is true even for such important issues as security and peace, in the face of growing antagonisms, the war between Russia and Ukraine, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This shows how the international women's movement has changed and how difficult it is today, across divisions, to effectively organise an agenda of women's interaction and cooperation for global peace and equality.

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