MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY AS AN INSTRUMENT TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS:

The role of the United Nations' World Summits since 1995

by

KAREN ANN REDELINGHUŸS

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

MAGISTER OF DIPLOMATIC STUDIES

(MDIPS)

in the

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

PRETORIA

MAY 2001

ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS

iii

iv

v

vi

APPENDIXES

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS   Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome

CEDAW   Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against
              Women

CSW   Commission for the Status of Women

DAW   Division for the Advancement of Women

ECOSOC   Economic and Social Council

FAO   Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations

IBRD   The World Bank

IFAD   International Fund for Agricultural Development

vii

ILAO	International Civil Aviation Organisation
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMO	International Maritime Organisation
INSTRAW Women	International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO's	Non-governmental Organisations
OSW	Office on the Status of Women
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UN	United Nation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCHR	United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights

viii

UNHCR	United Nations Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
USA	United States of America
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War was ushered in with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This historical event was a turning point for the structures that governed international politics, the role of nation-states and the functioning of international organisations, such as the United Nations. A shift in focus from military insecurities to human insecurities occurred. Human rights became a focal point of concern as regards international relations. The realm of international relations as a discipline is still one where women have little or no influence at all. The realisation that women have been and are players in international politics, but that their interests have been ignored all along, has led to the further realisation that international politics is, in fact, gendered. Women and men are affected differently by global issues. Until the Fourth UN Conference on Women (which was held in Beijing in September 1995), women's rights as human rights have not been adequately addressed. Women's rights need to be fully integrated into the United Nations' human rights regime, rather than being considered a mere additional global issue.

After the Second World War there was a realisation of the need to control war and to prevent the outbreak thereof. With the signing of the UN Charter in 1945, a new experiment in the organisation of states, i.e. the world summit, came to fruition. New role players on the international stage started appearing, especially after these role players had gained their independence from the former colonies and after the breakdown of the Soviet Union had occurred. These new actors began interacting with one another on the international stage. The end of the Cold War indicated international change and brought with it new roles for international organisations. This state of affairs necessitated a major shift in focus for the United Nations: A shift from an ideological perspective, i.e. peace and security between states, to that of a humanitarian perspective, i.e. justice within states. Optimistic sentiments emanating from the end of the Cold War were soon subdued by the many post-Cold War problems on the then global agendas. The real challenge for multilateral diplomacy, having become truly global in scope and not merely an interaction between the trans-Atlantic

superpowers, was to deal effectively with complex humanitarian issues. These complex issues included the advancement of women's rights.

Until the beginning of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975 – 1984), global issues had been considered as being gender-neutral, i.e. that both men's and women's experiences of global issues were identical. This sentiment had dire and tragic consequences for the plight of women and children alike. The realisation of this need for a gender-specific focus on global issues challenged the very foundations of international relations. A new approach to solving global problems was necessary. Besides these incorrect assumptions regarding the handling of these global issues, women were (and still are) underrepresented in the formal political decision-making structures for international relations. Especially since 1975 women have begun to organise themselves as actors in global politics at all levels by way of multilateral conferences and structures.

For long the various activities concerning international relations were assessed and dealt with from a male perspective. Men controlled the corridors of power, as well as the mechanisms of war and peace. They formed the foreign policies of states – while women were generally excluded from giving their perspective at all. It never occurred to the men in power to contemplate just how by these global matters were affecting women. Women were compartmentalised within the domestic sphere and were, quite frankly, under the 'protection' of the men controlling the corridors of power. Both as victims and role-players women were excluded from international relations and diplomatic discourse. As a social science, international relations were impervious to feminist critique and theorising. This imperviousness perpetuated the absence of a gender focus on global issues and undermined a gender-sensitive approach to the study of international relations. The shift in focus in international relations from military to humanitarian security had a decisive influence in making the advancement of women's rights a global issue.

The primary aim and foci of this study

The primary aim of this study is to analyse how the practice of multilateral diplomacy, especially within the structures of the United Nations, has promoted the advancement of women's rights globally, with particular attention to world summits since 1995. In this study the main theme will be on how, since 1995, multilateral conferences have played a crucial role in expanding the recognition and protection of women's rights globally.

This study has three main foci, i.e. multilateral diplomacy, women's rights and the advancement of women's rights by way of a multilateral diplomatic instrument, *viz*. the United Nations. Many works have been written from a feminist perspective. However, none have adequately analysed what instruments, particularly diplomatic instruments, have been employed in the advancement of women's rights. This study is intended as a necessary addition to the vast storehouse of literature on the subject of women's rights. The hope is therefore expressed that this study, in some small measure, contribute to a proper perspective of all the facets of the relationship between women's rights and the UN as a multilateral diplomatic instrument.

This study aims to test the following three hypotheses:

Firstly, multilateral diplomacy, by virtue of its character, has a constuctive role to play in the advancement of women's rights.

Secondly, global issues affect women and men in different ways.

Thirdly, although the UN has become the voice for the international women's movement, civil society (*viz*. the NGO's) makes a vital contribution to the advancement of women's rights.

Chapter Two deals with multilateral diplomacy, thereby giving this study its theoretical framework. Multilateral diplomacy has the capacity to consolidate global efforts and to

address global problems. What has multilateral diplomacy managed to accomplish for the advancement of women's rights? Before answering this pertinent question, a thorough study of multilateral diplomacy is required. A historical overview places the development of multilateral diplomacy within the context of historical events, the former most certainly being influenced by the latter. With the political developments, as well as the forces of globalisation and fragmentation, the post-Cold War period has had a profound effect on the manner in which international relations are managed. As an instrument of multilateral diplomacy, the United Nations continues to deal with a multitude of changes and new global issues. The significance of the relationship between the UN and these new actors of the global stage in the post-Cold War period is also particularly focused upon.

The title of this study specifically refers to the advancement of women's rights and the world summits dedicated to this cause since 1995. This approach demands an explanation of what the conference procedures are, before focusing on what the United Nations both is and does. An outline is given on how the United Nations is set up, i.e. the main organs and the specialised agencies. The latter are vigourously involved in the advancement of women's rights, with agencies having being set up for this specific purpose. If used properly, the United Nations, as a diplomatic instrument for multilateral diplomacy, can benefit the advancement of women's rights as a means of coordinating these global efforts.

In **Chapter Three** an attempt is made to describe the status of women's rights within the ambit of international relations. It is thus necessary to understand the character of what women's rights constitute in order to appreciate the extent of the improvement and advancement thereof: A clear explanation of why women's rights should be regarded as a global issue and not merely an issue reserved for discussion by feminists. A theoretical outline is given by focusing on four examples of what constitutes feminist theory and how it perceives the rights of women with international relations. Women's rights as human rights is a highly contentious issue, particularly by the feminist theorists. There are a number of shortcomings within the international human rights regime, which pose a major threat to the advancement of women's rights. These shortcomings will be dealt with in detail. Issues, such as mainstreaming and how women feature within international relations form a crucial

part of the main thrust of advancing the rights of women. Proper mainstreaming is required, not only the establishment of a gender department or to have women as a mere add-on issue in international relations. Whether or not this happens depends on a number of obstacles, such as cultural diversity, inadequate expertise and the co-ordination of problems. In certain cultures women may prefer to adhere to cultural pressures than be mainstreamed into the international system and to be part of the decision-making processes. A large and diverse number of people attended the Beijing Conference in 1995. Their varying responses and statements is focused upon, the purpose here being to highlight the culturally diverse viewpoints and what the various cultures deem the status of women's rights to be.

Diverse issues on the global agenda are nothing new. However, the realisation of the fact that women and men could possibly be affected in a different way within specific issues, i.e. that global issues are gendered should be confronted. A fresh approach to deal with the issues is now required. The pertinent question asked by Cynthia Enloe (1989), *viz. Where are the women?*, also begs the question where they are or should be in international relations. Enloe's question, therefore, forces us to confront questions, such as how women are affected by wars and what role should women play in peace-keeping.

While this study thusfar has dealt with the *how* (multilateral diplomacy) and the *what* (women's rights), **Chapter Four** investigates *what has been achieved* by multilateral diplomatic instruments, such as the United Nations. Has the United Nations, by means of international conferences, made progress in the advancement of women's rights since 1975? In this chapter an in-depth study is made of what has been achieved since then. The women's movement and multilateral diplomacy, in the form of an international conference, are commonly characterised by organising themselves globally towards a common goal. The discussion on the actual implementation of women's rights is divided into three sections and the contribution of each section to the advancement of women's rights is highlighted. There is little use in discussing the status of women's rights at an international conference. The outcomes of these conferences must be significant to the women of the world. The implementation of these outcomes, as well as what the duty of the state is, are major challenges to the successful advancement of women's rights globally. In the follow-up

Special Session to Beijing in June 2000, each participating government had to account for either their action or non-action in implementing a gender focus to their decision-making mechanisms. The South African perspective on the advancement of women's rights needs particular attention.

Chapter Four also focuses on a specific case study, namely the advancement of women's rights in South Africa. Post-Apartheid South Africa has meant different things to different people. South Africa celebrates the breaking down of racial barriers. So should it also celebrate gender equality. As regards the advancement of women's rights, the South African government sent its representatives to Beijing and then proceeded to set up a national machinery to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. This study will briefly focus on what mechanisms have been set up, as well as what the current perspectives on the advancement of women's rights are.

In summation, the crux of the matter is thus, *viz*. What has multilateral diplomacy achieved towards the advancement of women's rights since 1975? In this outline the contributions made by this diplomatic instrument are analysed by putting the issue of the advancement of women's rights squarely on the global agenda. It is important to focus on the advancement of women's rights in South Africa because the process of transformation must deal with the eradication of discrimination based on race and gender.

CHAPTER 2

MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY

1   INTRODUCTION

One of the core elements of multilateral diplomacy is that three or more parties attend an international conference, consolidate global efforts and attempt to solve problems that challenge humanity. These conferences ensure that discussions on issues are conducted by means of oral, face-to-face exchanges, rather than the one-on-one written style of bilateral diplomacy. Thus multilateral diplomacy, with its capacity to consolidate global efforts to address global problems, is a suitable mechanism for addressing the advancement of women's rights. Issues under discussion are monitored very closely, signaling the participants' clear commitment deal with the obstacles they face. The multilateral conference also creates a lobby for the advancement of women's rights: having made it to the conference stage, it would be difficult to sideline issues indefinitely.

Diplomatic practice, i.e. the management of international relations, has evolved through the ages. Multilateral diplomacy is no exception. Prevailing global issues at any given time in history, but particularly since 1945, have had their influence on both the practice of multilateral diplomacy, as well as on the institutional machinery of the United Nations. How has the process of multilateral diplomacy made its mark as an effective method of promoting the advancement of women's rights issues? In order to provide clarity both from an analytical, as well as descriptive perspective, it is necessary to focus on how events in history have altered the way multilateral diplomacy operates. This study bases its rationale on the view that multilateral diplomacy, by virtue of its characteristics, has made specific contributions to the advancement of women's rights. The UN and its machinery will also be discussed, particularly as it currently functions. While the world will continue to experience dramatic change, there is no consensus on the meaning of this change and how it will affect multilateral diplomatic practice in the future. No study of multilateral diplomacy is

complete without an in-depth focus on the UN and the complexity of the issues that it deals with.

2   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1   Diplomacy

Diplomacy is the management of international relations by negotiation rather than by force or other means (Rittberger in Boisard and Chossudovsky 1998: 20).

(a)   Bilateral diplomacy

Bilateral diplomacy is the management of international relations by consultation and negotiation between two states through heads of state, ambassadors or direct contacts being made between government departments (Ibid.: 21).

(b)   Multilateral diplomacy

Multilateral diplomacy is the management of international relations by negotiation between three or more states through official representatives without the service of a specialized secretariat. All member states of the UN have a direct or indirect influence, which ensures that the vital interests of all parties are taken into account. The weaker parties are never placed in a compromising situation. Generally, multilateral diplomacy strives to attain an objective and a lasting solution to a global problem (Roberts and Kingsbury 1994: 133).

(c)   Conference diplomacy

Conference diplomacy is that part of the management of relations between governments, and also between governments, as well as intergovernmental organisations that occurs at international conferences. (Kaufmann 1996: 7). A distinction can be made between

permanent (institutionalised, conventional such as at the United Nations) and ***ad hoc*** multilateral diplomacy (conferences that could last a week and deal with specific issues).

2.2   Multilateral

"Multilateral" refers to an organising principle, an organisation or an activity that call for distinct co-operation between various countries.

(a)   Multilateralism

The term "multilateralism" has several interpretations. It can refer to international trade between two or more countries without any restrictions or discrimination between them. It can also refer to international diplomatic accords or treaties between two or more states. For example: The United States of America (USA) consults with its European counterparts before making important foreign policy decisions to ensure a unified stance. "Multilateralism" also refers to the coordination of relations among three or more states in terms of certain principles. An institutional arrangement, such as collective security, is characterised by these multilateralist principles. Since peace is indivisible, war against one is thus *ipso facto* war against all. In such cases a collective response is called for by means of diplomatic measures, initially. Economic sanctions, as well as the use of collective force, follow. The aim is to avoid the frequent outbreaks of war, precisely as a result of this community-wide response. The '-ism' in "multilateralism" suggests that this concept is a belief or ideology rather than a straightforward state of affairs (Ruggie 1993:9-10).

Multilateralism maintains that activities should be organised universally for a specific group. Multilateralism is an ideology that promotes a multilateral activity, but requires of its participants to forgo all temporary advantages defined in terms of national interests. Coalitions are also discouraged. Participants in multilateralism are required to not define their interests in terms of their national interests (Ibid.: 55).

(b)   Multilateral institutions

Multilateral institutions focus on the formal organisational elements of international relations. Permanent addresses and locations, permanent staffs and secretariats are distinct characteristics of these institutions. An example of a multilateral institution is the United Nations. The legal basis of the UN is set out in the UN Charter. It cannot force states to comply with the Charter. The Charter was drafted in 1945 and sets out the principles of action as regards threats to peace, instruments and procedures of international justice, as well as general rules for economic, social and political cooperation. The powers conferred upon the Security Council are greater than any that have been used by an international body. The extent of these assembled powers altered the manner in which international politics was conducted (Scruton 1983: 59).

(c)   The institution of multilateralism

The institution of multilateralism can be found in the abovementioned established organisations, but it appeals more to the less formal and less codified habits, practices and norms of international society (Ruggie 1993: 53-54). A distinction between multilateral institutions and the institution of multilateralism is necessary, since the one may not mirror the other as regards an issue.

2.3   Summits

Summits are not the same as conferences. At a summit, a single issue may be discussed at a high level. A conference may deal with a number of issues and on a different level. Summits involve multilateral diplomacy of a special kind. During and after the First World War, the perception was that by eliminating the stiffness of formality and protocol, participants in summits would make better decisions. Those who possessed supreme authority would make these decisions. Summitry is considered to be a risky method of diplomacy. However, summitry has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are that a statesperson could be portrayed as a leader with a hands-on approach to foreign

policy matters, while a disadvantage is that strained diplomatic relations or even a war between two countries could result. (Berridge 1995:94).

Types of conferences

(i) **Informational conferences** are forums at which information is exchanged on international issues, for example the UN conferences on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy in 1995, 1958, 1964 and 1987 (Rittberger in Boisard and Chossudovsky 1998:21).

(ii) **Deliberative conferences** are forums for discussing international issues and making recommendations on pertinent government policies as regards specific issues, for example the UN conferences concerned with advancing the status of women (Ibid.: 22)

(iii) **Legislative conferences** are forums for drafting treaties or conventions and for having them subsequently ratified by participating states, e.g. the Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea in 1958, 1960 and 1973-83 (Ibid.: 22).

(iv) **Executive conferences** are forums that ensure that decisions are binding on members and offer guidance on those decisions to the secretariat of the international organisation, for example the UNDP Executive Board, which makes Decisions on Indicative Planning Figures (Ibid.: 22).

(v) **Pledging conferences** are forums that provide for governments to pledge voluntary financial aid to international programmes, e.g. emergency relief and peacekeeping missions.

Having defined the various concepts above, the evolution of multilateral diplomacy will be focused upon and will serve to highlight the significant relationship between global events and this method of diplomatic interaction.

3   HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY

Through the ages historical events have shaped multilateral diplomacy into how it functions today. Multilateral diplomacy - albeit not in its present form - can be traced back to the alliances in the Greco–Persian world of the fourth century BC. Conference diplomacy first featured in modern times at the Congress of Vienna in 1814/15, following the negotiations of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Its primary purpose was to formally terminate the Napoleonic wars and to settle matters of territorial redistribution. The monarchs or their representatives would meet to conclude peace agreements, especially after a period of war. Disputes regarding dynastic successions were also discussed at these early conferences, where an attempt was made to establish and legitimise a new territorial *status quo* (Rittberger in Boisard and Chossudovsky 1998: 15-16).

The European states system was the main impetus for the development of the modern state-system. The state system also gave rise to the development of modern multilateral diplomacy. The first half of the twentieth century was primarily characterised by two world wars, as well as by the growing presence of nuclear threats. The devastation caused by the First World War and its aftermath demanded that international conferences be used for organising diplomatic exchanges between nations. The establishiment of the League of Nations after the First World War was the main result of this decision. Both the Great Depression of the 1930's and the Second World War demonstrated the drawbacks of political and economic unilateralism. What followed was an upsurge of multilateralism in the management of international relations. In June 1946, fifty-one states embarked on an experiment in organising states to control the outbreak of wars by means of international law and organisation. In this way members of the international community committed themselves to preserving the peace that had been won at a great cost. The founding of the UN system confirmed that diplomatic interaction was evolving.

Although multilateral diplomacy strongly featured in the nineteenth century, it blossomed in the twentieth century. Reasons for this growth varied somewhat and are based on the fact

that transport made it easier for the participants to attend such conferences. Developments in technology and information continue - as they did in those early days - to influence the development of multilateral diplomacy.

The UN as was the case with its predecessor, had the authority to enforce peace by means of diplomatic, economic and even military action, if necessary. During the second half of the twentieth century, especially in 1993, no fewer than thirty-five wars were raging. The reason for the upsurge in conflict at this time was the aftermath of the post-Cold War period. This upsurge was indeed a tragedy for humankind. The UN reacted to the upsurge in conflicts by increasing its presence in conflict-ridden areas. The mass media, such as the television broadcast network CNN, ensured that the UN's presence was clearly depicted in their reporting thereby creating a new kind of responsibility and openness on the part of the UN.

3.1 Reasons for the increase of multilateral diplomacy in the twentieth century

Among the other reasons for the 'blossoming' of multilateral diplomacy in the twentieth century was the realisation that conference diplomacy, which was based on majority-voting within the UN, was the most effective way of ensuring a certain degree of international influence (Berridge 1995: 73).

Firstly the realisation that multilateral diplomacy presents the only assurance for successful negotiation. A **successful and well-organised** conference is characterised by the following:

- The conference is focused.
- It deals with either a single issue or with a series of related issues.
- All interested parties are assembled in an informal setting.
- The conveners have a vested interest in the conferences success.
- An *ad hoc* conference will ensure that a deadline is attained (Berridge 1995: 56-58).

Secondly, multilateral diplomacy, affected by means of a conference of the important powers, alludes to the idea that, by being present at such a conference, a country would be a member of a **'power club'**. This membership enhances a state's prestige, and in certain circumstances, a powerful nation could interact successfully with its rival. Many consider the Security Council of the UN to be the power club referred to above. It is easier to demonstrate sincere commitment to solving global issues, by means of a conference, than through normal diplomatic channels. Even if the subject of a conference is considered to be a waste of time to some, a country not being present when crucial decisions are being made, is a threatening prospect, since a decision could be taken by those present which may not suit the absentee country.

Thirdly, a multilateral conference can **advance bilateral diplomatic interactions** by allowing certain participants to discuss issues that are not included on the formal agenda. Important bilateral talks can be initiated at the conference by the powerful mediators and then develop further in the future, for example the Geneva Conference of December 1973 and the subsequent bilateral Arab-Israeli discussions (Ibid.: 59-60).

Fourthly, in the early part of the twentieth century the Liberal school of thought regarded the state not as a single, rational, national actor in a constant state of war referred to by the Realists. Instead the **state was rather regarded as a coalition or a conglomerate of coalitions representing individuals and groups** (Doyle and Ikenberry 1997: 11-12). The Liberal school of thought emphasized the importance of popular consent in sustaining government authority.   Governments had to be accountable both domestically and internationally. To an extent this was achieved by open diplomacy, i.e. negotiations in the 'open'. Open diplomacy affords smaller states a measure of influence. It should be noted that conference diplomacy does not necessarily involve multilateral diplomacy – but the League of Nations and the UN were the first great examples of 'open diplomacy'.

Finally, agreements made at multilateral conferences had a better chance of being adhered to because of the **open display of consensus** at signing ceremonies and the effective, follow-up machinery (Berridge 1995: 60). This final point is crucial for the advancement of

women's rights, because, once the **Beijing Platform for Action** has been ratified, the government is under an international obligation to implement the decisions in their national policies.

The proliferation of international organisations has influences on frequency and the diversity of international 'conferencing'. Diplomatic interaction *via* conferences, unconnected to any international organisation, has also grown. An upsurge in the diverse number of foreign policy problems, which were characterised by the internationalisation of political issues and the increasing number of sovereign states has put pressure on the capacity of the system. Multilateral diplomacy (and conference diplomacy in particular) simplifies the complex issue/actor factor in modern international relations (Rittberger in Boisard and Chossudovsky1998: 15).

The proliferation of NGO's that participate in the many international conferences indicates the widening circle of actors participating in the latest trend of diplomacy by conference (Ibid.: 18). With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the bipolar superpower structures, the international system became fragmented. Accompanied by rapid economic globalisation, which created greater interdependence, multilateral diplomacy and international organisations now occupied the centre of the international relations stage. The multilateral nature and scope of the post-Cold War environment could not be accommodated by bilateral discourse only.

3.2   Multilateral diplomacy in the post-Cold War period

Trends that dominate the world in the post-Cold War era are the consequences of the forces of globalisation and fragmentation. The international community faces increasing complexities in international relations. These problems have become the responsibility of the UN and multilateral diplomacy. Most turning points in the twentieth century have resulted from a world war or a global conflict. These global events respectively influenced the practice of multilateral diplomacy. However, the end of the Cold War, though dramatic, did not have the same significant effect. Change may be happening at such a rate, that there

is a well-founded fear that existing international mechanisms for managing such changes, cannot cope: thus inviting chaos and possibly another world war (Muldoon 1998: 1-3). According to historian Fritz Stern (1998: 9):

> "We live in a profoundly ahistorical age. Our knowledge of the past remains dim; our consciousness is dominated by headlines, by snippets from the screen that tell of the latest crisis or atrocity. In a globalised world our attention shifts rapidly, our perspective has broadened and our understanding has narrowed. The leaders of today are all too often caught up in crisis management or in pursuit of electoral gains; the public is tired or suspicious of grand designs".

3.3   Changes to diplomatic interaction

Diplomacy is unquestionably paramount in managing the turmoil of the post-Cold War era. The multilateral institutions that have been established (including the UN) together with other important actors will prove to be indispensable to contemporary international relations, provided that they evolve and become relevant to today's problems. There are, however, three visible changes to diplomatic interaction: The strengthening of multilateralism as a norm, changing priorities on the multilateral agenda and the increase in non-state actors (NGO's) involved in diplomacy (Ibid.: 7-8).

In the **first** instance, **multilateralism has been strengthened** and a multipolar world structure has developed.   This multipolar structure has rendered the UN and other international organisations the core diplomatic framework, which the international community uses to deal with complex global problems. From 1990 onwards the number of multilateral summits - especially UN-sponsored global conferences – has increased. Coalition building now goes beyond governments and currently includes NGO's, multinational corporations and other regional/international organisations.

The **second** aspect of visible change is changing the **priorities on the international agenda**.   Traditionally security issues dominated in the post-Second World War era.

However economic, environmental and social issues particularly associated with globalisation, have currently taken centre-stage. Conflicts in the post-Cold War era centre on violence within, rather than between, states. Acts of genocide characterise the disintegration of many states, with gross humanitarian atrocities and war crimes, such as those in Bosnia and the former Zaire. The Security Council of the UN had to modify its strict interpretation of Article 1, paragraph 7 of the UN Charter. The article refers to the prohibition of intervention within a member state. There have been criticisms of the UN's peacekeeping operations, especially those in Bosnia and Somalia. Now the UN subcontracts tasks to select NGO's in an attempt to eliminate the UN's strategic overstretch in the 1990's.

The **third** change, i.e. the **increased involvement of NGO's in diplomacy**, is the most visible. Growing activism and more streamlined NGO's (also known as civil society) have totally eroded the traditional role of the state. NGO's are building good reputations as constructive partners with governments and international organisations in post-Cold War diplomacy (Ibid.: 8-14).

In the post-Cold War period transnational contacts have increased dramatically which, in turn, have increased global awareness and forged a sense of a new commonality and identity. Governments are also now challenged by individual loyalties. Human rights activists, environmentalists, animal rights advocates, gays, the disabled, indigenous peoples, children and women are, but to name a few, among those who have organised themselves by developing global agendas. For example, Green Peace International is concerned about the environment and has established an effective network of NGO's. Another example of a NGO, this time pertaining to the advancement of women's rights, is the Network of Non-governmental Organisations of Trinidad and Tobago for the advancement of women. There is a lengthy list of both existing and newly accredited NGO's that attended the special session of the General Assembly "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". They have grouped together in the form of NGO's and furthered their interests in international institutions. Today the role of NGO's is to mobilise interest/action toward targeted results, with a monitoring function acting as a type of world police force (Spiro 1995: 45).

NGO's have the capacity to influence and act directly when it comes to issues, such as the environment and human rights. This exposure to direct action contributed to the proliferation and influence of NGO's. Their aim is not to become a super state, but to promote global constitutional order. NGO's are intensively involved in multilateral institutions, including UN organs and global conferences. They have become permanent actors on the global stage.

With all the changes occurring and the multiple actors now involved in international relations, the prospect of unfolding chaos is very real. Coordination and cooperation between actors can help advance both individual and shared agendas by implementing collective lobbying and bargaining power. As multilateral diplomacy has expanded in the post-Cold War era, the need to ensure that national and regional resources are used to their best effect internationally has been acknowledged. Coalition formation has promoted the value of collective action and the adoption of a unified approach to global issues (Leigh-Phippard 1996: 1).

By appreciating the fact that it is people who make war and people who make peace, the UN's relationship with NGO's requires a particular approach. NGO's are quite efficient in the delivery of goods in war zones, which basically means that NGO's and other non-state actors are less important in the security arena, than they are in areas of human rights and sustainable development issues. As a measure of reform, the UN needed to include NGO's in the international security system. On the whole in attempting to improve its capabilities, the UN must reassess at its traditional approach to sovereignty and the operations of its international operations to safeguard peace and security (Weiss Forsythe *et al.* 1994: 87).

4   NATURE OF MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY

The term 'old diplomacy' (more commonly known as 'bilateral' diplomacy) as opposed to new diplomacy, was dominated by almost 300 years by the French system of diplomacy. Old style diplomacy was characterised by resident ambassadors, secret negotiations,

ceremonial duties, protocol, integrity and professionalism. It dealt with state-to-state relations with the ambassador as the key actor. **New diplomacy** emerged in the early nineteenth century and blossomed in the twentieth century. It made diplomacy more open to public scrutiny and was characterised by the establishment of an international organisation. The latter posed as a forum for the peaceful settlement of disputes, while also discouraging – to an extent - the waging of war.   The tasks of a diplomat in the 'new' era differs somewhat to those of the old.   These were (1) formal (presentation of credentials, protocol) and substantive (explaining national policies and negotiations with other governments) representation; (2) information gathering; (3) preparations for new initiatives; (4) reducing inter-state friction; (5) managing order and change; and (6) creating, amending, drafting international rules (Muldoon 1998: 4-5).

The twentieth century heralded a change in the role of the resident ambassador. This role change was owing mainly to an explosion in the number of conferences attended by three or more parties, i.e. an explosion in the practice of multilateral diplomacy.   Put in its proper perspective, bilateral diplomacy is diplomatic interaction between two parties, while multilateral diplomacy is diplomacy between three or more parties.   Oral face-to-face exchanges, in the form of conferences, characterise multilateral diplomacy, as opposed to mainly the written style of bilateral diplomacy.

By virtue of the nature of the diplomatic interaction, multilateral diplomacy has altered the basic skills required of a diplomat, i.e. oral, face-to-face exchanges as opposed to the written style of bilateral exchanges.   Greater specialisation is crucial for dealing with the variety of political, economic and social issues on the multilateral agenda.   An ability to offer military advice is now necessary, and when dealing with development issues, a basic understanding of the environment and population is necessary. Diplomats must be able to move from a bilateral to a multilateral diplomatic environment, depending upon where she/he is posted.

4.1   The importance of coalitions

Multilateral diplomacy has experienced an increase in the number of coalitions, mainly because of the bargaining strength attained when pursuing a common goal, particularly when it comes to majority voting.   Coalitions aim at facilitating the exchange of points of view and the coordination of positions.   They also serve as a caucus group when members, who attend a wider conference, can meet and act collectively as semi-autonomous bodies. A coalition can determine the very dynamics of a negotiation, even though it has no official status.   It improves lobbying strength and offers a framework within which the exchange of information and the pooling of human and financial resources can occur.   A coalition is an effective tool of conference management, which has simplified the overall framework in which multilateral diplomacy functions.   The increase in the number of coalitions utilised reinforces trends in international relations towards regionalisation and globalisation.   States realise the limitations of national power when seeking diplomatic solutions.   More specifically, in the realms of multilateral diplomacy, where states have held onto their traditional power bases, such developments in coalition forming are indicative of the 'paradoxical trend of globalisation and fragmentation' (Ibid.: 14-15).

4.2   The conference process

The conference process is a crucial element of multilateral diplomacy.   It is therefore imperative to analyse the conference process before discussing how the UN operates.   As previously mentioned in this chapter, there are five types of international conferences, viz. informational, deliberative, legislative, executive and pledging conferences.   But how are these conferences set up, especially taking into account the magnitude of the issues dealt with at these venues?

The conference process comprises four main stages (this overview does not specifically refer to any particular conference).   The **first** is the **conference proposal** stage.   Either governments or international secretariats make the official proposal for a conference.   If a conference were convened as a result of a previous conference, then such a conference

would be a strictly follow-up session. NGO's seldom initiate conferences because they lack political muscle. During this stage, governments are involved in exploratory talks, during which they determine whether or not an international problem exists that would necessitate a major multilateral negotiation effort, i.e. an international conference. The nature and number of participants in order to assure an effective conflict or problem management, is also under discussion during this initial stage. The ulterior motives of states are a reality in two respects, i.e. a state may attach some degree of prestige should it be invited to a specific conference; on the other hand, certain states may gain a degree of competitive advantage in a negotiating process. This stage is concluded with a decision to 'convene a conference, on a specific issue, with these entities in attendance (Abi-Saab in Boisard and Chossudovsky 1998: 22-23).

The **second,** and most demanding stage, is the **preparation** stage. Specific aspects of a subject of a conference are identified and selected. The options available, i.e. national, regional or global (for collective action) are put forward to the conference participants for their consideration and acceptance. The Preparatory Committee is either a permanent or an *ad hoc* body. The former has jurisdiction in a specific area, and the latter, is being convened for a specific occasion. During this stage, the intergovernmental body officially entrusted with these preparations, i.e. the Preparatory Committee, ensures that the following occur:

- The conference agenda is drawn up.
- The procedural rules are agreed to.
- The issues under discussion are assessed.
- The final document containing the principle declaration, the programmes of action and other substantive resolutions are drawn up – all of which must be generally acceptable (Ibid.: 23)

This stage ends with the actual opening of the conference, subject to the required minimum consensus required for the procedure and the expected outcome of the conference. Whether a conference is a success, failure or even if it actually is convened, depends largely upon this stage. Information groundwork is crucial, owing to the strict time-constraints within which

these international conferences operate: 'zero base negotiations'[1] is not an option. It is during the preparatory stage that states that participate in building coalitions attempt to increase their clout during negotiations. Role-playing is determined during this phase, i.e. the dominant state assumes a leadership role, and the less powerful states may assume the role of the mediator. The level of involvement such as either active or passive, is also determined here (Ibid.: 23-24). A moderate level of involvement, as opposed to the dominant and weaker states, also exists. Countries such as Finland and Sweden fall into this category. Even though they are deemed 'less powerful', they still exert an enormous amount of influence, mainly owing to their financial strengths. These countries have a considerable amount of global influence because of the high degree of legitimacy afforded to them by their global counterparts.

The **third** stage - the **decision-making process –** pertains to the actual conference itself. Quite often the outcome of a conference has been discussed to such an extent during the previous two stages, that this stage merely serves as a formal endorsement. Intensive bargaining over the final shape and content of the conference outcome occurs at this stage. These tentative results obtained previously are transposed into 'legally phrased, but not yet binding' agreements. More often than not 'renegade' participants will attempt to push forward last minute concessions that have been refused up to that stage.

Positive results depend on the following characteristics in a negotiation environment:

(i) The *de facto* reduction of the number of participants, especially during the critical negotiation processes.

(ii) Establishment of committees for such issues which can lessen the complexity of the issues under discussion.

---

[1] 'Zero base negotiation' – is when participants have to start from scratch to negotiate, with no beforehand information available. International conferences have serious time-constraints, regarding the costs involved or the participants needing to be elsewhere.

(iii)   A multilateral forum more easily allows for 'packaged deals' much easier than in a bilateral set-up.

(iv)   A multilateral forum does not encourage zero-sum solutions.

Consensus building strategies at multilateral conferences include the following: compensation, focusing on related problems and isolating unwilling participants. The latter strategy is especially important if the support of such participants is not crucial or that is the search for the lowest common factor in a problem area that is being contested] (Ibid.: 24-25).

The final and **fourth** stage is **conference implementation**. Specific plans must be drawn up from the previously obtained consensus and then be implemented by the participants. Implementation does not occur immediately. The consensus obtained at conferences runs the risk of being rejected by national bureaucracies, parliaments or powerful societal interest groups. Discrepancies between the actual policy outcome and the agreed upon policy programme can be reduced by lowering the threshold of expectations concerning the outcomes of the international conference. Also by maintaining a regular institutional linkage between all levels of post-conference decision-making, i.e. at a national, bilateral and multilateral level (Ibid.: 25).

4.3   Successes and limitations of multilateral diplomacy

Multilateral diplomacy has its advantages, as well as its limitations in dealing effectively with modern global issues. The fact that it is able to 'evolve' with respect to the international environment indicates that it will survive in the international arena. That multilateral diplomacy, particularly in the form of international conferences, has positively contributed to placing the issue of the advancement of women's rights on the global agenda cannot be disputed. The characteristic of international conferences – that is of being focused on a single issue - i.e. on women's rights and not women's rights as an add-on to a general conference, is undisputedly a positive characteristic of multilateral diplomacy.   Other

characteristics, such as power club membership; that other bilateral diplomatic interaction may be encountered; that smaller states have more clout; and that a participating state must adhere to the agreement (owing to the open display of consensus) are also positive characteristics of multilateral diplomacy. In these global forums crucial global networks are formed, promoting contact between like-minded people, who team up to provide solutions to global problems. A serious limitation of multilateral conferences is that states may attend and may agree to proposals, and yet, once they have returned to their respective countries, they may either misinterpret the proceedings or not comply with what was agreed to. It is not possibile to enforce compliance with agreements. Thus, even though a state has made certain commitments, no global mechanism exists to enforce compliance. For example, fundamentalist religious groups may return home and reinterpret the proceedings according to their points of view.

Is there a need for such large-scale conferences? The answer is both straightforward and three-fold: **Firstly** such large-scale international conferences create vital international/global networks. People are brought together to jointly discuss and solve global problems. **Secondly**, a critical mass of people brings significant political attention to an issue. This attention is particularly important for the advancement of women – an issue which, in certain circles, is deemed a 'soft' issue. **Thirdly**, in a strange and subtle way conferences, such as the Beijing Conference in 1995, force governments to commit to an issue, particularly if they have ratified a convention. The reasons given above justify the need for conferences. The successful utilisation of conferences towards advancing women's rights is crucial.

For the purpose of this study it is essential that the reader is clear about how the UN functions as the main facilitator at a global level. It is therefore desirable to focus on this aspect to gain a proper perspective of all the features of the UN.

5   THE UNITED NATIONS

On 24 October 1945 the UN was formed by 51 countries that shared the common goal of being committed to preserving peace through international cooperation and collective security. Today almost every country belongs to the UN – a total of 189 countries. On becoming a member, a state must agree to accept the obligations contained in the UN Charter – an international treaty that sets out the basic principles of international relations. The four aims of the UN are clearly indicated in the UN Charter:

- To maintain international peace and security.
- To develop friendly relations between states.
- To cooperate in solving international problems and promote respect for human rights.
- To be a centre for harmonising the actions of nations (Roberts and Kingsbury 1994: 6-8).

All the UN members are sovereign countries. The UN is not a world government and it cannot make laws, but it can facilitate the means to help resolve issues such as international conflict and it formulates policies concerning common issues. All the members, no matter who or what they are, have a voice and a vote in the process. The UN is intensively involved in a large number of activities that are mostly central to the functioning of international society. Activities are tackled either on a multilateral basis or by individuals and represent a collectivity of states. The UN is involved in the transformation of international society by participating in the process of managing global problems (Roberts and Kingsbury 1994: 60-61).

5.1   The main organs of the United Nations

The UN comprises six main organs. The first five are based in New York, while the sixth is based at The Hague in the Netherlands.

The **General Assembly** is a type of parliament of nations where all the UN's members are represented. Here they meet to discuss the world's most pressing problems. Although each member has a vote, decisions concerning certain matters of international peace and security, the admittance of new members, the UN budget (including the peacekeeping budget) needs to have at least a two-thirds majority vote. Although a simple majority obtained as regards other issues, they attempt to reach decisions through consensus, rather than through taking a formal vote.

The UN Charter delegates the **Security Council** the main responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. It is always on 'stand-by' to meet on an *ad hoc* basis. Currently there are fifteen council members, with five having permanent status: China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Ongoing discussions take place to make changes to the permanent members in order to realistically reflect both the political and economic realities of the international community. Most decisions need the affirmative vote of 9 out of the 15 council members. Should the Security Council be faced with a threat to international peace, it is compelled to first settle a dispute peacefully. It may offer suggestions for a settlement or undertake to mediate. If there is already conflict in an area, it could attempt to secure a ceasefire or to send a peacekeeping mission to prevent a confrontation between the opposing forces. Other measures, such as economic sanctions or arms embargoes, may be taken. In extreme cases they may use "all necessary means" which may include collective military action (for example the bombing of Belgrade by NATO) to ensure that its decisions are carried out. In retrospect the 'slowness' in the UN's reaction - especially with regard to the Bosnian conflict and its genocidal horrors - was heavily criticised (UN in Brief 2000: 2).

The **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** coordinates the economic and social work of the UN and its 'family'. Its key role is to foster international cooperation for development, while closely consulting with NGO's, thereby maintaining the vital link between the UN and civil society. With a complement of 54 members, it meets throughout the year. Since 1998 the Council has broadened its horizons to include humanitarian themes. The Commission for Human Rights monitors the status of human rights globally.

Other bodies within the Security Council monitor the following: social development; the status of women; crime prevention; narcotic drugs; and environmental protection.

As a principal organ, ECOSOC coordinates the economic and social work of the UN together with its specialised agencies, including the role of women in development (Interview Roche: August 2000). One of its main responsibilities is to call for international conferences. ECOSOC's main mission is to promote the well being of all people all over the world, i.e. to deal with human rights issues. ECOSOC also oversees a fair amount of research and reporting by collecting statistical data to fill in the gaps of existing knowledge.

The **Trusteeship Council** provides international supervision for 11 trust territories, administered by 7 member states. Its basic purpose is to provide assistance towards self-government or independence. The last trust territory was the Pacific Islands (Palau), which became the 185th member state in 1994. Its work is now complete and it meets on an *ad hoc* basis.

The **International Court of Justice**, also known as the World Court, is the main judicial organ of the UN. It has 15 judges, who are elected by the General Assembly and the Security Council. This court decides on disputes between countries and provides advisory options to the General Assembly and Security Council upon request.

The **Secretariat** handles the substantive and administrative work of the UN. It is headed by the Secretary-General, who provides overall administrative guidance. It has a total staff of 8 700 drawn from 160 countries (The UN in Brief 2000: 1-3). When the UN succeeded the League of Nations, it was very much the intention that the Secretary General should play a more prominent role. At the time some members favoured the notion that the Secretary General should be a super-statesman, a world conciliator and an arbitrator. President Roosevelt favoured the Secretary-General being referred to as the 'World's Moderator', i.e. to mediate at any great conflict. There was also the feeling that the Secretary-General should be given greater powers of initiative than that held by the League Secretary-General (Luard 1994: 105-106).

In 1945 the Secretary-General of the new organisation was given the authority to raise any matter that he(she) deemed should receive the attention of the Organisation. A Secretary-General could place any matter on the agenda of the Assembly or make either oral or written proposals to the General Assembly regarding any question under its consideration. This is how the right of initiative was implemented in both the Security Council and the General Assembly. The Secretary-General has an important role to play, because he may establish a committee on any particular topic. In terms of Article 98 the Secretary General shall submit an annual report on the work of the organisation to the General Assembly.   All the predecessors (including the current Secretary-General, Kofi Annan) have used this authority to submit – though sometimes controversial - proposals on how the UN should function. Refer to Chapter Four, Section 5 for a quoted summation of how Kofi Annan views the issue of women in the UN. To demonstrate its true commitment, the UN should appoint a woman Secretary-General when Kofi Annan's term of office expires. Such an appointment would demonstrate real reform within the UN (Ibid.: 106).

The UN system is combining its efforts to deal with the complex global issues it is currently challenged by. Globalisation, with its effects and repercussions, such as rises in global fragmentation and ethnicity-awareness, has contributed to the complexity of these issues. The streamlining of the UN's resources overlap areas of expertise helps to defy the efforts of any country that acts independently. The Joint Programme on AIDS has six UN agencies and other joint programmes pooling together. Another example is UNICEF, UNDP, The World Bank and the WHO, which joined forces in an attempt to combat malaria, which kills a million people annually.   Partnerships with the UN currently involve international organisations, governments, academic institutions, foundations, NGO's and the private sector. At present there are 43 global issues on the UN agenda. See Table 2 for a listing.

5.2   Specialised agencies, UN programmes and the status of women

As discussed earlier, the UN comprises six main organs, in addition to a host of specialised agencies. Each specialised agency has its own separate constitution, membership and

budget. Article 57 of the UN Charter states that these specialised agencies are 'established by intergovernmental agreement'. They have broad international responsibilities, as indicated in their basic instruments, in economic, social, cultural, educational, health and related fields. There are currently nineteen specialised agencies within the UN system[2]. The role of the UN's specialised agencies is to revolutionise international law in their own domain. Establishing a full, legal regime with its own form of sanctions has enforced adherence to these laws. This major feat particularly applies to the IMO, the ITU, the ILO, the ICAO and to other fields (Singh in Roberts and Kingsbury 1994: 411). When the specialised agencies were originally set up, the international need for and response to them, was not anticipated. The administrations within the UN, which were established to deal with identified problems, and owing to the nature of these new global problems, were forced to deal with one another. Overlapping functions and the need for coordination became a reality in the international sphere. The funds and programmes were set up to 'wedge' the functional gaps that existed between the specialised agencies. For example, the UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF needed to work with UNESCO, WHO and the ILO to develop a number of population control programmes in the mid-1970s (Groom and Taylor 1990: 236-237).

As for the status of women, the necessary work required effective coordination in order to succeed in advancing women's rights. The following UN programmes and specialised agencies have a particular role to play as regards women's rights and the advancement thereof.

(i) UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)

- Coordinates and mainstreams gender issues in the UN system.
- Secretariat of four UN world conferences on women.
- Services the responsibilities for the Commission for the Status of Women (CSW) and CEDAW.

---

[2] Refer to table 1

- Gender analysis of the **Beijing Platform for Action's** twelve critical areas of concern.

- Gender mainstreaming mandate within the UN system, in support of Angela King, the Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General.

(ii) UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

- Promotes the empowerment of women and gender equality at national level.

- Increases the participation of women at all levels of development planning and practice.

- Links concerns of women to all critical issues placed on national, regional and global agendas.

(iii) International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)

- Gathers information, through research, on the advancement of women and rendering women's contributions to development more visible (Women Watch. UN Working for Women n.d.b: 1-2).

(iv) The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

- Promotes gender-based equity in accessing productive resources.
- Promotes action to reduce rural women's workload.
- Enhances opportunities for paid employment.

(v) The International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD)

- Invests in the production potential of women.
- Believes that development projects empower women to provide for their families and contribute to the development of their communities.

(vi)   International Labour Organisation (ILO)

- Focuses on gender equality in places of work globally.

(vii)   UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)

- Promotes equal rights for women and girls.

(viii)   UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations (UNESCO)

- Promotes gender equality, the self-empowerment of women and their full citizenship.
- Is guided by three principles:
    - **(a)** To mainstream a gender perspective in policy-making activities.
    - **(b)** To promote the active and broad participation of women.
    - **(c)** To develop projects that benefit girls and women.

(ix)   UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR)

- Ensures the universal enjoyment of all human rights by giving substance to the will and resolve of the global community as expressed by the UN.

(x)   UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

- Provides guidelines on responding to and preventing sexual violence.
- Provides gender training to staff known as People-Oriented Planning (POP), to properly deal with needs of refugee women.

(xi)   UN Population Fund (UNFPA)

- Affirms its commitment to reproductive rights, gender equality and male responsibility.

(xii)   UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

- Focuses on the social dimensions of contemporary problems affecting development.

(xiii)   The World Bank (IBRD)

- Promotes gender equality through its programmes and projects.
- Provides gender profiles per country.

(xiv)   The World Food Programme (WFP)

- By promoting opportunities for women, assists in solving problems of hunger and poverty.
- Reduces inequalities by allowing women to have access to and control over the distribution of their food.
- Addresses special nutritional problems faced by women and their children.
- The UN has adapted its operations to deal with the advancement of women hence the WFP is good example of how the political environment influences the mechanics of multilateral diplomacy and of the UN.

It is therefore crucial to understand how the UN operates - especially within the ambit of these changes - in the external environment of international relations and decision-making, as well as to understand how changes influence the practice of multilateral diplomacy (Ibid.: 3-10).

5.3 Multilateral diplomacy in the United Nations

Whether it be retrogression, transformation or transition, the world is changing at an incredible pace. All this change has not eluded the practice of diplomacy or multilateral diplomatic forums like the UN. At present, (since change is on-going) the basic features of diplomacy i.e. that it is state-centric, tradition-bound, makes use of protocol and representation, still prevail. New problems that resulted from the Cold War, such as intrastate conflicts, the increase in 'failed states' resurgent irredentism, environmental threats and deteriorating socio-economic conditions (not only in the Third World, but in Russia too), have all been added to the complex diplomatic agenda (Muldoon 1998: 6-7). Since the formation of the UN in 1945, other forums for multilateral diplomatic activities have also responded to international events. Many of the principles, practices, international relations processes and decision-making procedures have been adjusted. It is necessary to focus on the changes that have occurred in the UN in the post-Cold War era (albeit in terms of its perspective as regards the political landscape) that have determined its response to these security challenges.

5.4 The United Nations and international security after the Cold War

After the Cold War the UN experienced a major shift in focus to issues of justice within states, i.e. humanitarian issues, rather than on issues of peace and security, i.e. ideological issues. At the height of the Cold War the UN was no more than a minor role player in international peace and security matters. As a tool for propaganda purposes, it reached its lowest point. However, by playing a supportive role in the provision of peacekeeping forces (and once regional hostilities had ceased), it reached a high point once again. Its notable achievements were, amongst others, playing a role in decolonisation and developing a set of international laws for human rights and other issues. After the Cold War, regional conflicts flared up, and the international agenda now includes non-security issues, such as the environment and, of particular note (for the purpose of this study), the status of women in the UN (Wilenski in Roberts and Kingsbury 1994: 437).

After coping with restrictions on its activities for forty years, a two-fold question must be asked of the UN: Firstly, can the UN take the lead as a harbinger of peace and, secondly, are there currently new restrictions imposed on the UN? In order for it to survive, the UN must reform its peace and security operations; it must adapt to the modern needs of the next generation of operations. World politics is dominated by 'flare ups' in micro-nationalist struggles or intrastate conflicts. Ethnic particularisms and self-determination dominate this new world 'disorder'. For example, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia have jointly established twenty new countries. Conversely, Somalia and Haiti have had no organised form of governance since 1993, hence the phenomenon of 'failed states'. It is no longer appropriate for peacekeepers to use traditional light arms to sort out these situations as major political and operational dilemmas have come to the fore. Peacekeeping has become a complicated activity. Now the protection of UN administrative and humanitarian staff is a major challenge for the UN. The blue helmets face major risks when attempting to quell internal wars.

At the Millennium Summit the current Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, identified specific areas of action to be considered by the Summit. He noted that a new century had brought new challenges. The global community expected their leaders to identify and act on the challenges facing them. The UN could assist these leaders in meeting these challenges, but there would have to be a shared and renewed sense of mission. The effects of globalisation, (in terms of. the unequal distribution of its benefits), are being felt. On an international level, the movement of crime between countries has increased at an alarming rate. People are more aware of injustices and brutalities in remote countries. They also expect their own countries to take action. States could deal with such issues if they acted together *via* common institutions and by basing their actions on shared values and rules. These institutions must reflect the realities of the time and serve as an arena of cooperation for states, non-state actors and global companies.

The renewal of the UN and its functions are crucial to a stronger UN. The opportunity to strengthen depends on governments, the private sector, non-governmental organisations and multilateral agencies. The areas of action are briefly the following:

The UN must identify its own core strengths. These strengths are not based on power, but on the values the UN represents. It is necessary to reform the Security Council so that the UN can work effectively and enjoy unquestionable legitimacy.

The UN must network for change. The UN should bring together international institutions, civil society, private sector organisations and national governments to pursue the common goals.

The UN must make digital connections. The UN should make use of technology to become more efficient.

The UN must advance the quiet revolution. By means of structural reform, clearer consensus should be obtained on priorities to adequately meet the needs of the 21st century (Millennium Report of Secretary General of UN 2000: 10-12).

A series of urgent global problems confront the UN. Many parts of the world are experiencing instability and confusion. International institutions need to be improved, which will require cooperation, understanding, resources, performance and leadership. Governments and the private sector must alter their vision from short-term interests to long-term concerns. This will not happen, unless the prevailing uncertainties of peace and security are focused upon. A consistent and reliable mechanism for maintaining peace and security (such as the UN) in this post-cold War period is crucial for the future (Urquhart in Roberts and Kingsbury 1994: 103).

5.5   The role of the United Nations in post-Cold War international relations

It is necessary to focus on the role of the UN, i.e. what it does and how it interacts with the forces of change in the political environment, in order to contextualise the UN with the state of post-Cold War international relations.

(i)   What the United Nations does for peace

One of the central purposes of the UN is to maintain world peace. It plays an international role in disarmament, peacemaking, peacebuilding and peacekeeping, *viz.* in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas and the Middle East (The UN in Brief 2000: 3-6). A major criticism leveled against the UN's peacekeeping role, in particular conflict zones such as the Bosnian war, is that the UN does not intervene/act as soon as the conflict breaks out. This shortcoming can be attributed to a lack of coordination and insufficient resources. During the bombing of Belgrade by the NATO forces, the UN's peacekeeping role was relegated to mainly making public statements on the political sideline.

(ii)   What the UN does for justice, human rights and international law

A major UN goal is the eradication of poverty, which is the cause of many basic human rights abuses.   As for international law and the UN's contribution thereto, all its conventions, treaties and standards have provided a framework for promoting international peace, security and economic and social development.   Once states have ratified international agreements, they become legally bound to them. However, it is still a difficult task for the UN to enforce states, that have or have not ratified such agreements, to comply with them.   With the efforts of the UN a variety of multilateral agreements have been concluded by governments. One of the UN's great achievements is the establishment of a comprehensive body of international law and human rights legislation. As for human rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1948, sets out the rights and freedoms to which all women and men are entitled (Ibid.: 7-8).

(iii)   What the UN does for humanitarian assistance

The need for humanitarian assistance can arise from man-made or natural disasters, e.g. conflicts, floods, droughts or earthquakes.   The consequences are the loss of lives, displacement, and communities unable to sustain themselves and extreme suffering. The UN provides emergency assistance to victims in the face of a disaster – most of them

women, children and the elderly. The UN has to overcome major logistical and security obstacles in the field. These obstacles are linked to providing humanitarian assistance in a world where the erosion of respect for human rights proliferates. Aid is withheld from the needy, and aid workers have been deliberately targeted for acts of violence. The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator develops humanitarian action policy and promotes an awareness of humanitarian issues (Ibid.: 8-10). Humanitarian assistance has had the most tangible and far-ranging impact on the human rights activities of the UN. The UN's humanitarian assistance programmes are often not perceived as being one and the same matter: UNICEF and UNHCR are two of the most effective instruments of direct assistance offered by the UN. UNICEF has focused its attention and resources on the Third World populations to help them survive and acquire the necessary skills to sustain themselves. An example of the UN's need for proper coordination is the plight of the Iraqi Kurds, who fled Baghdad after the Gulf War, only to die of hunger in the Northern mountain ranges of Iraq. The UN needs to be constantly alert in order to respond to a human need. The UN cannot wait for an appeal for assistance from a state that may never materialise. Following this Kurdish disaster, an international appeal was made for the international community's right to humanitarian intervention and to enable the UN to act more promptly (Farer and Gaer in Roberts and Kingsbury 1994: 255-256).

(iv)   What the UN does for development

The central mandate of the UN is to promote higher standards of living, adequate sources of employment together with conditions of economic and social progress. This mandate referred to constitutes almost 70% of the UN's work. According to the UN, a prerequisite for lasting world peace is the eradication of poverty and improving the well being of all people, including the advancement of women, in particular. The UN has led the way in setting the agenda and obtaining international consensus on action for such development. Despite the commitments made by the developing countries at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development to launch full-scale anti-poverty programmes, donor countries are cutting back on aid. Here the UNDP also needs to focus on the commitments it has undertaken to provide, *viz*. a more coordinated approach to solving global poverty problems.

The UN needs to improve its capacity to systemically verify those policies that work or those that do not work. This will assist developing countries in achieving the poverty reduction targets (UN Document. UNDP Poverty Report 2000: 8-9).

World conferences have identified practical ways of solving global problems, such as: education (**1990**), environment and development (**1992**), human rights (**1993**), population and development (**1994**), natural disaster reduction (**1994)**, social development (**1995**), the advancement of women (**1995**), human settlements (**1996**) and food security (**1996**). By formulating these key developmental objectives, (such as the advancement of women) the UN develops programmes to realise these objectives. The UN works closely with member states to implement decisions taken at conferences (UN in Brief: 10). The world conferences on the advancement of women's rights are pertinent to the main focus of this study. Focusing on multilateral diplomacy as a tool will assist in assessing the extent to which such conferences have succeeded or failed in attaining their goals.

5.6   NGO's and the United Nations

NGO's are non-profit, voluntary citizens' groups organised on three levels, i.e. local, national or international. NGO's are driven by people that share common interests and who are task-oriented. NGO's bring the concerns of citizens to the attention of their governments. They keep a close watch on policy-making and encourage political involvement by the community. Some are organised according to specific issues such as human rights, the environment or health matters. The relationship between NGO's and the UN varies according to their goals, their venues and their mandates (UN Department of Public Information – NGO section. 1999. NGO's and the Department of Public Information).

The UN first accorded NGO's a 'political platform' particularly in the fields of human rights and environmental protection. At the time an awareness of a trans-national civil society was developing. This awareness was due mainly to increased cross-border transactions. Another factor was the coming together of multiparty democracies, market liberalism, as

well as the related political and social values that also began to emerge. States began to delegate their power to these cross-state groupings and international institutions. State sovereignty was changing to accommodate human rights, economic aspirations, as well as internal and external notions of legitimacy. What constituted the notion of national interest was also in a state of flux. Domestic, transnational and international levels began to emerge slowly (Roberts and Kingsbury 1994:2). The main aim of NGO's is to attract attention for themselves and for their cause. They also aim to be recognised as global actors that are solving specific crises in the global arena. However, their downfall is their lack of accountability, hence the UN's caution concerning the acceptability of NGO's.

The growth of these NGO's can be largely attributed to two major factors, i.e. increased participation of non-national identities and the possibility that they will be able to affect direct action at the level of international organisations. The aims of NGO's are to impose a type of global, constitutional order and norm-creating multilateral regimes. These specific aims already constrain state action, especially as regards human rights and environmental matters. Regime-building activities occur in multilateral organisations, including existing UN organs and at *ad hoc* world conferences. These *ad hoc* conferences have become permanent fixtures in the global arena. The latter are also extremely conducive to strengthening NGO's (Spiro 1995:49). NGO's must mobilise mass and popular participation for their success. Citizens can be educated; enthusiasm can be generated; consciousness and public support can be raised; and access to and influence over the use of funds is also possible. Debates on issues, as well as an understanding thereof, are crucial. Different perspectives must be heard, especially those normally ignored by states. NGO's must ensure that theories are put into practice, i.e. action from the words. To this end, vigilance, lobbying and insistence are vital. (UN General Assembly Press Release. GA/ 5813n.d.: 1-2).

As regards NGO's and the UN, the Secretary-General has reiterated that NGO's should be considered to be 'indispensable partners" of the UN. NGO's must assist the UN in achieving its goals by assuming this partnership role in the "process of deliberation and policy formation" and "in the execution of policies". In this way global policy discourse is

widened, which results in better and more legitimate decisions (NGO's and the UN n.d.:2). The relationship between NGO's and the UN has not been without its setbacks. NGO's have been waiting for the granting of formal consultative rights with the General Assembly, but negotiations have failed to obtain any results. The UN was recently required to scale back on its global conference series (thanks to the opposition of the United States). NGO's consequently encounter difficulties in gaining access to the new settings, i.e. the UN is making use of the special sessions of the General Assembly or other UN venues. Previously at these global conferences NGO's experienced intense interaction with delegations in the preparatory process, as well as encountering excellent networking opportunities. Governments have also started placing restrictions on NGO's by curtailing their right to speak independently and by curtailing their funding sources. These factors have affected the NGO's' capacity to interact and participate in the global arena (Ibid.:4).

The UN needs to reach out to civil society so that broader society can benefit from its expertise. The UN would then be more relevant to the outside world. Today the UN and civil society have a joint contribution to make in dealing with peacekeeping, human rights, development, promoting gender equality and democracy. Currently within the UN, NGO's are involved in special sessions and conferences. Every instance of involvement is negotiated, which is both time-consuming and resource consuming. For this partnership to work, both the UN and civil society have a certain commitments to each other. The former (the UN) should practice inclusiveness and responsiveness, while the latter should interact with the rest of society in a constructive manner. The credible reputation of NGO's should not be brought into disrepute by those NGO's whose aim is not to enhance the global arena by promoting the quality of life or peace, but to instead promote themselves (Ibid.:2). NGO's from the South and the North hemispheres are now cooperating with one another, which will serve to strengthen the NGO's' position.

5.7   Assessing the progress of the United Nations in dealing with modern global issues

The UN needs to carefully assess what needs to be done to ensure that it remains relevant in terms of dealing with the global issues of our times. The need for internal reform is becoming increasingly vital for the UN's survival. The reform of how the Security Council operates, as well as who serves on it, has a direct bearing on who the new actors and role players in the international arena will be. Since 1992 both the UN Secretary-General and the Security Council have increased their diplomatic and peacekeeping activities with a certain degree of success. The UN has played an important role in the general upliftment of people, particularly for the women of the world. The current Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, has become a champion of the global advancement of women. Annan's stance on human rights has had a positive effect on the UN's general attitude towards the issue of women. The difficulty faced by the UN has been, and will be, trying to persuade all its member states to take the advancement of women's rights seriously. Forced compliance, as discussed in the Section 4 on multilateral diplomacy, is a serious restriction on the UN concerning the performance of its duties.

Other limitations pertain to the UN's limited resources and its lack of preparedness for large-scale global issues. The coordination of its activities and a lack of resources seriously affect the UN's chances of successfully dealing with global problems. Its indecisiveness in responding to or acting upon the situation in Bosnia served to aggravate the situation. Its failure to act promptly and firmly in this instance can be ascribed to the reluctance of the United States of America and the European Union to commit to sending armed task forces. The reality of state sovereignty also hampers the UN's capacity to intervene when necessary. The UN must be able to have access to and authority within states. International law is essentially weak, especially as regards the issue of forcing states to comply. Certain crucial internal matters remain unresolved such as the USA's membership fees. The UN is accused of wasting money with its hosting of large-scale multilateral conferences (Luard 1994: 173-184).

If the UN assumes a partnership relationship with civil society and basically shares the international work with other bodies, the success rate would probably improve, and the UN would be more effective. It took the NGO's and their initiatives to focus the world's attention on the status of women as regards global issues. The UN itself must take seriously the need for extensive gender mainstreaming within its own structures before it can expect its member states to take women's issues seriously. Only then will the advancement of women's rights become a success story for the UN.

6 CONCLUSION

The very nature of multilateral diplomacy renders it conducive to managing order and change efficiently. Through international organizations, such as the UN and its multilateral conferences, this style of diplomatic interaction is laid open to public scrutiny. Sensitive issues, such as the advancement of the status of women, could be (and have been) prioritised on the global agenda and could be dealt with in the policies of member states. A greater measure of specialisation demanded from the UN, modern diplomats and other actors, would also demand a greater measure of diversity from the role players to deal with the variety of political, economic and social issues. As multilateral diplomacy has developed through history in response to the political environment, so it should continue to do so and embrace the changes that occur globally. Especially since the end of the Cold War, it has no longer been security, but humanitarian issues that have featured in modern international relations. How these new problems were dealt with has varied, but the introduction of NGO's to the political scene and involving them by exerting necessary pressure, has significantly altered the *status quo* of just governments and the UN's solving of global problems. It has become crucial for the UN and NGO's to become coordinated and to cooperate on their activities.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS

1   INTRODUCTION

In 1998 the UN and human rights organisations around the world celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which symbolised the world's commitment to securing human rights for all people. Yet it was only in 1993, at the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna Conference), that the world for the first time openly acknowledged that the body of international law and the mechanisms created for promoting and protecting human rights, had not taken into account more than half of the world's population. Women had also been excluded from international relations. This exclusion meant either that statecraft, waging war and wealth-creation were strictly men's business or that international relations was gender neutral, i.e. men and women are equally affected by international relations and its processes (Pettman 1996: 47). In order to provide a theoretical perspective concerning this study, it is necessary to focus on feminist thought, particularly on the Liberal, the Radical, the Socialist and the Post-modern schools.   A theoretical framework places trends and phenomena that occur in the international arena in a women's rights perspective. The actual practice of world politics has suffered from a neglect of feminist theoretical perspectives. Knowledge of what constitutes human rights and global issues have been distorted by a biased approach. Feminist theories offer a solution to correcting the societal inequalities within the international order.

What follows in this chapter is a description of the essential problem. Pertinent definitions of the relevant concepts will also be given. Crucial to this chapter on women's rights, is a brief discussion on the four schools of feminist thought. This description will provide the discussion on women's rights as human rights with a theoretical framework. Why is it necessary to examine women's rights as an intrinsic part of human rights? Why can this not be regarded as a given assumption? What obstacles lie in the path of advancing women?

These questions need to be clarified before embarking upon a discussion on the holding of and assessment of the conferences held by the UN since 1995.

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Human rights

Human beings have rights simply by virtue of their being human (Donnelly in Mansbach 1997: 530). Rights are the moral obligations that individuals have towards one another. "Human rights belong inherently to each person, each individual and are not conferred by or subject to any government authority. There should be only one single standard – a universal standard – for judging human rights violations" (Kofi Annan: UN Secretary-General).

Human rights are the natural born rights for every human being, universally. These rights are not privileges. Universal human rights reflect the efforts of the international community to achieve and advance a common standard and an international system of law to protect human dignity (Ayton-Shenker 1995: 1-2).

2.2 Gender

According to the South African Commission on Gender Equality, the term "gender" refers to the roles allocated to men and women respectively, in specific societies and at particular times. Factors that condition these roles are political, economic, ideological and cultural. Gender is not the same as sex – the former is related to societal factors and the latter to biological factors (Policy for Transformation n.d.:1-3).

The terms "masculine" and "feminine" do not describe physical characteristics, they are considered to be gender terms. In some cultures and societies certain characteristics pertain to the state of being 'male' and 'female'. Biologically, females and males are expected to behave in a particular manner appropriate to their gender. It is not accurate to equate the term "gender" with the term "sex" (Steans 1998:10).

2.2.1 Gender equality

"Gender equality" refers to the equal employment of women and men in terms of socially valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Value differs from culture to culture. An important characteristic of 'equality' is the empowerment of women to influence what is valued and shared in decision-making on societal priorities. It would thus be necessary to identify and eradicate the basic causes of discrimination on the basis of gender. Such action will pave the way for gender equality. In certain circumstances society will have to be reconstructed to eliminate the traces of male domination. Equality must be understood in terms of both formal equality and substantive equality and not simply in terms of women having to be equal to men. Gender equality should not be a matter of mere words. Rights on paper must be translated into real rights (Ibid.: 3).

2.2.2 Gender perspective

A gender perspective refers to focusing on an issue, for example from both a female and male point of view. International relations have always been viewed from a one-sided, male perspective. The primary aim of achieving a gender perspective is to create equity and equality between men and women. This approach is equipped with the methods and guidelines on how to identify the impact of the relations and roles of women and men on development.

2.3 Feminism

The term "feminism" first entered popular vocabulary in the early 1910's. Women's rights activists rekindled the struggle for suffrage, turning it into a nationwide political campaign. At the turn of the last century many women's groups were being formed. The International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, founded in 1900, expanded to such an extent that by 1913 it became the third largest affiliate of the American Federation of Labour (Faludi, S. 1992: 70).

The concept of feminism is based on the belief that women are entitled to enjoy the same rights and privileges as men. The feminist movement attempts to introduce changes that will end discriminatory practice and realize 'equal' rights for women in all spheres of life. As regards feminist theory, it is not a purely abstract academic activity, but an ongoing critical engagement with the world. Feminism is considered to be a starting point, from which contending values and practices are focused on and from which personal actions are given social meaning and political significance (Steans 1998: 15).

2.4   Women's rights

Women's rights are human rights. Women's rights are human rights that are not only universal, but they are also indivisible. Human rights are also women's rights. Women risk not only having violations committed against them as human beings, but are also violated and discriminated against because they are women. Many governments reject the notion of universal human rights as a standard. They argue that human rights and the interpretation thereof are subject to the interests of national security, economic strategy and culture. Women's human rights are often viewed in a restrictive manner (Amensty International 1995: 6).

Abortion rights, women's rights and citizenship are often juxtaposed. The ratification of CEDAW by the US has been postponed indefinitely, because, in their opinion, by acknowledging the rights of women, the abortion rights issue is lost. There is a connection between women and mothering. Women who chose not to have children are deemed to be lesbian and those who have abortions, are deemed as being 'unnatural' (Sullivan and Whitehouse 1996:6).

3   A PERSPECTIVE ON FEMINIST THOUGHT

Feminist theory is a critical activity within 'men's studies' (according to the feminists). This theory aims to transform structural oppression, beginning with experiences of oppression as

women. It is not a new activity. Early feminists, such as Sappho in classical Greece, Christin Pisan in Medieval Europe and Mary Wollestonecraft (1792) in Western Europe, engaged in social and political debates on the nature of authority, legitimacy, democracy and universal rights, naturally from a woman's perspective. Wollestonecraft called for the admission of women to the state's club. Her book, *Vindication of the Rights of Women,* was published in 1792 while the French Revolution was unfolding. Her main argument was that women should be included in discussions on the rights of men.

There is no single comprehensive theory of feminism; instead, there are a number of theories overlapping and contradicting one another. There are conservative feminists, liberal feminists, Marxist feminists and socialist feminists. These groups attempt to 'fit' in with universal mainstream theories. The radical feminists, eco-feminists and cultural feminists have put forward distinctive 'women's' positions. There are also lesbian feminists, Third World feminists and postmodern critical feminists, who draw on the following post-structuralism, French continental theory, psychoanalysis, post positivist epistemology and non-Western multicultural feminism (True in Burchill and Linklater 1996: 212.). Feminism is labelled as being a white Western women's activity. However, the 'woman' question arose in the Asian and Middle Eastern colonies and manifested itself within early anti-colonial nationalism (Pettman in Baylis and Smith 1997: 487).

3.1   Four schools of feminist thought

The differences and alliances within the feminist schools of thought shift over time and space. It is these very differences that are important for deliberating upon gender and how to overcome gender inequalities or oppression. One school of thought, for example the liberal feminists, will make a statement and then another, for example the radical feminists, will vehemently criticise the former. There is even what is known as the **first-wave of feminism,** which was concerned with suffrage, with women's legal, civil and educational rights. In the 1970's, particularly in the West, the **second-wave of feminism** occurred alongside other social movements of the time and focused on social rights and a more inclusive citizenship. Their politics affected their understanding of sexual differences,

which were summed up under the liberal, radical and socialist types of feminism (Baylis and Smith 1998: 487). The following discussion on the four schools of feminist thought will lend a theoretical framework to the discussion for the advancement of women's rights

3.1.1 Liberal feminists

Liberal feminists, such as Mary Wollestonecraft and Gloria Steinem, were intensively involved in equal rights movements. They strove to eliminate gender inequality by focusing less on gender differences and more on gender similarities. Since women have the same capacities for aggression, ambition, strength and rationality, they are, therefore, equal to men. This fact contradicts the argument that women are the opposite of and inferior to men. The question is: Why should the masculine be the norm to which all women should aspire? What happens is that the gendered division, and not the gendered notion of power, is being challenged. Power, therefore, is synonymous with aggression, ambition, strength and rationality (Peterson and Runyan 1993: 117). Liberal feminists are essentially equality feminists, who wish to put an end to the exclusion from or under-representation of women concerning power. They focus particularly on the military - especially the actual combat – protection of women - as a mechanism for keeping women from power (Baylis and Smith 1997: 487). A major criticism of the liberal feminists by other feminists is that equality is viewed in terms of men being the norm and that on men's terms only. The liberal perspective is in danger of encouraging the view that women in international relations are a possible add-on and a type of specialisation area (True in Burchill and Linklater 1996: 215.).

3.1.2 Radical feminists

The radical feminists differ from the liberals in that, instead of women using men as the norm of equality, men should rather celebrate feminine traits and adopt them. For them masculinity is the problem, with its emphasis on aggression and violence. Some radical feminists, such as Emma Goldman and Angela Davis (also referred to as cultural feminists), aim to revive the concept of femininity and elevate it as the norm. They also aim to positively redefine 'feminine' concepts, such as passivity, nurturance, emotionalism and

dependence. For example, passivity is negative if it hinders a person from taking political action against oppression; it is positive, if it promotes a desire, especially in sensitive negotiations, to be accommodating. Nurturing is portrayed negatively when it is associated with women and reproductive labour; it is positive when it is associated with caring for the world as a whole, e.g. involvement in the United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF) (Peterson And Runyan 1993: 118). These women's values, which are rejected by the liberals, are what the ecology and world politics need. They stress that dependency, and not autonomy, is essential for human and planetary survival, hence the inescapable interdependence of all life.

A major source of male domination over women is the female body, i.e. ideological domination by way of pornography, stereotypes and jokes, and practical domination, by way of sexual violence, denial of reproductive rights. Heterosexism, which is assumed as the sole 'norm', is also criticized. Radical feminist activists are intensively involved in rape crisis centres and battered women's shelters. The military is regarded as an institution that inflates masculinity, oppresses women and destroys the planet, as well as human life (Ibid.: 118). The radical feminists regard the essentialist perspective of the male and female nature to be a major point of criticism. In trying to find a common ground and a feeling of solidarity amongst women, the radical feminists offer an alternative to patriarchal society. Radicals tend to overlook the major divisions that separate groups of women and men (Steans 1998: 21).

Radical feminists acknowledge that people and nature are bound together. They stress that the concept of interdependence needs to be re-evaluated. These feminists recognize the core of international relations to be an inescapable interdependence of all life on earth. Radical feminists are active within the structures of multilateral diplomacy and are involved in peace, ecology and reproductive rights movements (Peterson and Runyan 1993: 118).

3.1.3 Socialist feminists

To an extent the socialist feminists (such as Nellie Wong) support the goals of liberal and radical feminists, but they question the use of gender categories, which in their view, are problematic. The divisions between private and public, reproduction and production, are patriarchal constructs and are contrary to what the radical feminists say. The solution is not to re-evaluate the private sphere and reproductive work, but to focus on the fact that they are not as different as they appear to be. Millions of non-Western, poor, working-class women and men of colour, i.e. the majority of humans, do not have the choice as to who should and should not work. Being confined to the private sphere of family and home is a luxury unknown to poor and working-class women. According to the socialist feminists, it is pointless to separate productive and reproductive labour, i.e. the latter including 'free' labour done at home. They view the actual costs of this unpaid labour as keeping worker's wages artificially low (Peterson and Runyan 1993: 119).

Socialist feminists aim to influence the power system of capitalist patriarchy through empowerment by redistributing societal and global power, rather than boosting feminine 'traits'. Activists are involved in socialist revolutions, in women's economic movements and they focus on issues, such as women in welfare, women in development and women in the global factory. The military is criticized, because it extracts resources from state and global economies, which should rather be utilised for meeting basic needs. Socialist feminists marry class and gender, claiming that class alone would exclude much of the women's experience. Class cannot be properly addressed without taking the impact of gender into account. A criticism of the socialist feminists is that they leave a number of questions unanswered, e.g. why are women responsible for only reproductive and family labour; and what are the reasons for the feminisation of poverty? (Baylis and Smith 1997: 488)

Within Socialist feminism, the Third World (Black) feminists have accused the White feminists of disregarding race, culture and colonial relations as affecting the status of women. The ongoing debate within international relations concerning the Northern –

Southern hemisphere issue, is pertinent within Socialist feminist arguments. Socialist feminists concern themselves with building alliances across class lines between poorer women (mainly in the South) and the elite (mainly in the North). Reform of the UN's General Assembly, i.e. so that it does not only represent the rich Northern nations, is essential for the survival of the UN, according to the Socialist feminists (Ibid.: 488).

A socialist feminist, Nellie Wong, in her publication, *Socialist Feminism: Our Bridge to Freedom (1991),* maintains that the ultimate goal of a socialist feminist is to eliminate the sexual divisions of labour and to eliminate all who are oppressed. The socialist feminists regard themselves to be a radical and disciplined solution to the problems of race, sex, sexuality and the class struggle (Sylvester 1995: 64).

3.1.4   Post-modernist feminists

Jean Elshtain is a key proponent of postmodern feminism. In her work, *Women and War (1987),* she regards war to be fixing notions of gender solidarity around accustomed rules. Mothers and soldiers are very much alike. Both do their duty to the best of their ability, but have a sense of guilt that their job could have been done better (Sylvester 1995: 55).

Postmodern feminism raises pertinent questions about what has been accepted as 'his' world and about 'him' denying 'us' a place in international relations. These feminists criticize not only gender dichotomies and categories, but also the concept of gender itself (refer to the other categories of feminism). Gender and 'sex' contain traces of biological determinism and essentialism. The other categories of feminism are criticized for their use of gender within the capitalism, militarism and power systems as if feminism originates solely from male/female essential natures and their unalterable roles. Post-modernists demand a rethink of the terms "woman" and "man", which are labels. They regard the concepts of "woman" and "man" as being complex beings with characteristics that vary along the lines of race, class, nationality, ethnicity and sexuality. They reject references to men and women, blacks and whites, as if they were categories set over time and across varying cultures. They oppose a natural sisterhood of women who support a universal oppression. Women's

experiences of oppression differ quite considerably. White, Western women in a corporate world *versus* non-Western women of colour in rural India would not have the same "oppressive" experiences. Solidarity should entail women choosing to work together on an issue (Peterson and Runyan 1993: 121). Post-modernists also ask: 'Who is talking for women?'; 'Whose experiences as women have been excluded in feminist theorizing and politicking?'

Feminism, as a whole, is being attacked by a growing number of rightwing and fundamentalist movements. The effects of globalisation, together with the emergence of cultural and ethnic awareness, should not be underestimated as not affecting women's rights. A central common feature of the four schools of thought discussed is that they share an important goal, i.e. to redefine the boundaries of public domain *versus* private domain, and between personal *versus* the political. The feminists began to realize the gendered nature of IR that is how women and men are affected differently, thus the focus of research on gender and IR. They proceeded to reveal the role of gender issues and values, and analysed the gender-specific outcomes of international processes (Groom and Light 1994: 46).

3.2 Feminist thought and human rights

Some forms of feminism question only the degree to which women have been included in the protection of human rights. These are types of feminism that question the basic assumptions underlying the very notion of human rights, i.e. the appropriateness of the language of human rights; the effectiveness of the methods of dealing with threats to human life and dignity; and regarding certain rights as universal.

The following developments occurred as a direct result of feminist challenges to human rights: **Firstly**, the international community was urged, often by NGO's (such as the NGO Committee on UNIFEM, the Economic Commission for Europe Caucus and the Arab Women Alliance) to pay more attention to the human rights of women. These women's NGO's have monitored the political will and commitment of governments to implement the **Beijing Platform for Action**. Such action can be specifically listed as from 1975 – the UN

General Assembly's proclamation of the International Women's Year; (1976–1985) the UN Decade for Women; and the Mexico City conference held in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). **Secondly**, progress has been made in gaining international legal recognition for the human rights of women, the most notable being the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). **Thirdly**, the human rights of women are increasingly being written about. **Finally**, issues regarding the human rights of women are being brought to the attention of the broader public consciousness (refer to the Whorf hypothesis). Rape is now considered a war crime, following the world's increasing awareness of the atrocities in Bosnia, as well as the use of rape as a method of government intimidation in Haiti. Other violations of women's human rights include the following: female genital mutilation in Africa, and the Chinese use of abortion and infanticide as methods of selecting the sex of children, to name but a few (Williams 1997: 111-112).

However varying the different types of feminist thought, it is clear that the challenges put forward by the feminists regarding the human rights of women have had an effect on how the international community deals with the issue of the advancement of women. In the following section an exact exposition is given of the nature of the problem concerning the international human rights system and women.

4   WOMEN'S RIGHTS: LIMITED BY SOCIETAL DETERMINANTS

There exist a number of societal determinants that have an effect on women's rights. These determinants are religion, social systems and cultural diversity.

4.1   Issues underlying the treatment of women in many societies

The dichotomy regarding the public *versus* the private remains a problem in the violation of human rights. This public *versus* private role is still a contentious and as yet, unresolved issue. Torture, at the hands of public officials, is a violation of general human rights laws, while battery, which occurs at home, is regarded as a private matter, falling outside the

scope of international law. False imprisonment is another example: it is a violation of an individual's own political rights and could elicit international condemnation. Forced seclusion is viewed as a private matter, even when state institutions encourage it. The public *versus* private arena has long been an effective mechanism to continually oppress women. Lynn Hunt's discussion on the French Revolution elaborates on this statement that the sexuality of women is linked to a state's disorder. The French concept of masculinity at the time was challenged by the presence of women in public places, for example the powerful symbol of Marie Antoinette, hence the post-revolutionary restrictions on the role of women. Similarly, in the female genital mutilation (FGM) debates, American society is deemed to be decadent, because of the promiscuousness of the American women. Reining in on the sexuality of daughters thus protects cultural purity. In Algeria and Afghanistan women are attacked in public for not wearing veils, for getting an education or even for wearing cosmetics (Penna and Campbell 1998: 15-17).

4.2   Culture and social stratification as determinants of the status of women in society

Cultural belief systems and the social stratification, which results from it, more than often are based on religion and culture and play a major role in shaping stereotypes. These systems and stratifications also determine appropriate roles for men and women. The right of women to participate in political activities is severely limited when, through cultural beliefs, they are defined as mothers and wives. This is the case, particularly in Islamic countries, where women are confined to mainly family-oriented activities. In Roman Catholic-dominated countries, the stereotyping of women is even 'elevated' to maternal sainthood. These attributes are also not those belonging to conventional political power. Women are very much excluded from top leadership roles in the vast majority of these religious institutions. What this does is it reinforces gender stereotypes, i.e. that women are not equal to men and that they cannot be trusted with or lack the qualifications for positions of authority and power (Peterson and Runyan 1993: 76-77).

Cultural background is one of the main sources of identity. As a result of the effects of globalisation, there is a confluence of peoples and cultures in a multicultural world brimming with tension, confusion and conflict. There has been a return to traditional cultures and fundamental values, which has had a profound effect on the human rights of women. To some societies and to globalisation pessimists, women are worse off in this exciting period of global transition.

4.3   The inferior position of women in various countries

The potential vastness of cultural differences evident at international conferences is staggering. The Fourth UN Conference on Women held in 1995 in Beijing is an excellent example of the extent of this on-going debate on the interaction between diverse global cultures. During and after the conference questions were raised concerning why Beijing was chosen as the venue. China is notorious for boasting that it has its 'own' brand of human rights, which suits the purposes of the Chinese. The comments made by participants at Beijing serves to indicate how differently the various cultures present interpreted the concept of human rights. **Western leaders** were disturbed by their host's lack of political and civil rights. **Islamic leaders** complained about the extent of the criticism leveled against their countries. The **Vatican delegation** focused on attempting to have abortion declared a violation of women's rights. **Christian leaders** from the USA were concerned about the connection between homosexuality and women's rights at the women's conference. According to Marxist theory, when women become part of the labour market, they become economically independent. They would then join forces with working-class men in order to overthrow capitalism. The fact of the matter is that when these women enter the labour market, they are still solely responsible for their reproductive and child-rearing roles in the domestic sphere. The relationship between the public *vs*. private spheres is therefore a major flaw in the Chinese 'own' brand of human rights for women. The **Chinese** were boasting about their being honoured to host such a conference, because they were the leaders in the field of women's rights.

What these comments highlighted is that the concept of the universality of human rights and the diversity of perspective cannot be ignored. Human rights can only be recognized in a specific context, i.e. culture and the nature of society. Human rights are a Western concept and cannot be universally applied to various cultures. Global differences are ignored when the West demands universal human rights and basically displays a lack of tolerance for any differences (Penna and Campbell 1998: 11-12).

To focus on the issues of women's rights within the framework of cultural relativism or universalism more than often results in what is known as the 'blame game'. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Ms Bhutto, was applauded in her speech for criticizing the Chinese government's treatment of women. Granted, the comment came from a woman prime minister, but it was somewhat ironic, coming from a country renowned for having a poor track record as regards women's rights. Ms Bhutto, including other Pakistani leaders, retaliated to their critics and accused them of cultural imperialism.

It could be safely stated that many of the delegates who voiced their particular concerns actually could be accused of their own brand of cultural imperialism. **China** already mentioned on the previous page, is also accused of an alarming number of infanticide cases. The **Islamic states** send male delegates to speak on behalf of their female citizens. The **Vatican** frowns upon the use of condoms in a world where the number of female HIV/AIDS victims is on the increase. The **USA** had its concerns with homosexuality connected to the Beijing Conference. The USA is also at the forefront of international aggression - all in the name of peace, e.g. the bombings in Belgrade and their activities during the Gulf War, which resulted in the subsequent suffering of women and children. In the international arena not one country can boast having a clean record when it comes to considering women's rights: all have a considerable amount of work to do.

4.4   African woman's experience

A surprising fact for many is that, in many parts of pre-colonial Africa, women played an important role in decision-making in the villages. If a man mistreated a woman, the entire

community would condemn him for his actions. In those times, women worked collectively to impose sanctions on an abusive man. With the advent of colonialism, women's positions actually deteriorated.   Western institutions linked to Christianity under the banner of colonialism had no public role for women. Education for girls focused on domestic skills and home economics, as opposed to the classes available for boys that offered training in job-related fields, such as artisans or clerks. These institutions reinforced the Victorian-era Western concepts of gender divisions, especially as regards employment, education and women's 'place' in society, especially within the family (Peterson and Runyan 1993:118).

In post-colonial Africa, women played a major role in nationalist–liberation struggles. In 1956 South Africa witnessed the Pass March by thousands of women to protest against the use of 'pass books'. This event is still commemorated today and is regarded as having historical significance. Ironically, however, these same women are now demanding the right to own land and not to be considered minors in respect of their fathers or husbands (Penna and Campbell 1998: 15-17).   Colonisation and externally imposed modernisation (industrialization, urbanization and export-oriented economic strategies) have actually deprived women of the political rights and power that they previously held in their traditional societies.   For example in Nigeria, women were originally politically and economically powerful agents.   However, with the arrival of the colonists and their Eurocentric ideas of what constitutes male and female, indigenous political practices and divisions of labour have been totally transformed (Peterson and Runyan 1993: 77).

5   THE NEW WORLD ORDER AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Refugees, polluted waters, villages that have been bombed, starving children the HIV/AIDS pandemic – all these problems characterize the 'new world order'. These problems occur in both Africa and Bosnia: they are not peculiar to any one region or to any socio-economic group.   Globalisation has enabled people, goods, information, norms, practices and institutions to move about, irrespective of borders. Since the end of the Cold War there have been numerous attempts to specifically define the 'new world order' and its long term and short term effects on the international community.   For the purposes of this study, the

question is posed: **What is the effect of this new world order on women's rights?** (Turpin and Lorentzen 1996: 1).

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, it was expected that human rights would finally be afforded that community. Instead, it has been reported that, in the Baltic States, women have fewer rights and are experiencing a greater degree of inequality than when they were under Soviet rule. This greatly surprises the millions who believed that the newfound freedoms would mean a better life for all. Under the old system women were guaranteed jobs and had an acceptable standard of living. Freedom and choice were lacking previously, but not employment or basic social services. Now the women living in the Baltic States struggle to learn the new rules of the game. Many women worked on the collective state farms, and when these were dismantled, they faced competition in the workplace, which allegedly favours 'beauty over brains'. It is now mostly the menial work in the villages that these highly skilled, highly qualified and experienced women are faced with for their survival (Alyanak 1999: 1).

Marxism created a false sense of equality. As feminist critics pointed out, women were not an issue, because equality reigned in the workplace. Equality was not an issue in the domestic sphere. When the Soviet Union collapsed, so did the notions of gender equality. The free market system abolished women's quotas that, to an extent, ensured that women would be nominally represented throughout the workplace. The referred to 'new rules of the game' are that a woman's economic future is either in her husband's hands or subject to the supply and demand of available positions (Alyanak 1999: 2). Economic hardship goes hand-in-hand with a hardening of attitudes in general and a re-emphasis on traditional gender roles, i.e. patriarchy and conservatism then reign supreme. The structures that previously provided a support network for working women, such as government-funded day-care centres and facilities for the elderly, have been shut down. Dr Giedre Purvaneckiene, Lithuania's State Counselor for Women's Affairs, had the following to say at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995:

> "Women worked in full-time jobs, but the majority of them worked for lower pay and in lower-level positions. At the same time, women were expected to shoulder the main responsibility for household work. True equality never existed, neither in the workplace nor in the home, nor generally in society as a whole or in the political life of the country" (Alyanak 1999: 3).

True equality may never have existed in the former Soviet Union, but to the average woman in the Baltics, inequality with food on the table and clothes on her back, is better than equality with an empty stomach. This type of sentiment encourages a sense of complacency amongst women.

The impacts of the global issues that characterize this new world order on the rights of women warrant a separate study all together. However, to place women's rights in the context of some of these global issues, a brief description will follow on where and how women feature in IR and global issues.

There are currently 43 issues on the UN 2000 global agenda[3]. Of those issues, there is not a single issue that could exclude women, i.e. an issue that could not be gendered. This fact is the entire crux of the matter. The issues are interrelated global problems and they are gendered. They disproportionately affect women, and women respond uniquely to them. Gender must be viewed as the *nexus* for all of these global issues. The following global issues, *viz.* refugees and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, are but two of all global issues, in which women feature as victims quite prominently.

(i)   Refugees

In 1999 women comprised at least 80% of the refugee population. Traditional family and social structures have crumbled in some communities. The men left home either to fight or to seek better economic opportunities elsewhere. As refugees, women assumed the roles of

---

[3] Refer to table 2.

breadwinner, protector and head-of-household, as well as playing their traditional role of caregiver. As a result of cultural norms, lack of skills or low self-esteem and women's participation in a number of these activities have been hindered. As refugees, women are subject to sexual violence before, during and after their sojourns to places of safety. In some cultures a family headed by a female is often ostracized. When food aid is being delivered, they often are pushed to the back of the queue. In Rwanda, where 70% of the population is female, a project has been established called, The Rwanda Women's Initiative. The scheme aims to enhance the human rights of women, reduce the violence and sexual abuse directed against them and ensure that the women refugees are reintegrated fully into Rwandan society. The UNHCR offers these women skills training, rights-awareness training, education, healthcare and assistance that promote economic independence. During wartime, violations of human rights increase dramatically, as with gender-based violence. Rape as a weapon or war, coupled with sexual abuse and harassment, dog these refugee women throughout their lives. Once the actual violence has ceased, they endure years of severe psychological trauma, rejection by their families and communities, unwanted pregnancies and of course, HIV/AIDS (Women Watch. Preliminary analysis 2000: 1-2).

(ii) HIV/AIDS pandemic

In some religions and cultures the use of condoms is a taboo. It is out of the question for a female to prescribe how a male should conduct himself sexually, i.e. for a man to wear a condom is out of the question. This puts a woman at a great risk of contracting the HIV/AIDS virus. The problem of HIV/AIDS will continue to disproportionately affect women as long as women and men do not enjoy equal rights. Socio-cultural factors, economic dependency, a lack of decision-making powers and skewed access to education and employment hamper women and girls' capacity to sufficiently protect themselves from infection. No adequate policy currently exists in South Africa to protect women in their vulnerable position from contracting the virus (South African Commission on Gender Equality Annual Report 2000: 12).

6 THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

There are a number of theoretical, structural and organizational features of the international human rights system that could pose major problems to really improving the position of women. What follows is a focus on these problems, by integrating a gender perspective.

Firstly, when human rights were defined and conceptualised, the process did not really involve women. The omission of women gave rise to problems within the present framework of human rights, i.e. a failure to consider gender as a factor. **Secondly**, issues that really featured amongst women, such as underdevelopment, extreme poverty, illiteracy, gender segregation, lack of reproductive choice and systemic violence, were not really defined in terms of human rights issues. **Thirdly**, international law excludes activities that occur in the domestic sphere, especially activities of non-state actors. As the vast majority of women live their lives removed from the public domain, many violations that are committed against women in their communities and families are not dealt with. The first three points are directly related to the 'where are the women?" question posed by Cynthia Enloe and other feminists. The human rights system, global issues and the public *versus* private domain of international law had a major flaw in that a gender perspective was excluded (Gallagher 1997:20).

Fourthly, governments justify, on the basis of culture, religion or ethnicity both *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination against women.[4] This justification is what is known as a "relativist approach" to the human rights of women. It is a basic denial of the basic principles of universality and indivisibility. This approach obscures violations committed against women, reinforces ideological resistance to the notion of women's human rights and prevents any form of response from the international community (Gallagher 1997: 290-291). **Fifthly**, the significance of civil and political rights has, to an extent, minimized the economic, social and cultural rights that are meaningful in the lives of women. **Sixth**, the methods used to investigate and document human rights violations serve to obscure abuses

---

[4] Refer to 6: Women's rights and cultural diversity

against women. The exploration and acknowledgement of the root causes of violations against women and an effective response, as such, has failed to take place.

Seventh, humanity has realized that the fact of their 'humanity' is not enough to ensure women their rights. An institutional, as well as a geographical, separation exists between the human rights mainstream and women's mechanisms. This separation has further marginalised and weakened these mechanisms. **Finally**, the actual representation of women within the mainstream of the human rights establishment is seriously lacking. Even national delegations to political bodies, such as the Commission on Human Rights, hardly ever include a token female presence.

The Vienna Human Rights Conference (held in 1993) is widely recognized as the forum where the issue of women's rights as human rights became a matter of public concern. Many critics focused on the problems prior to the conference. However, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, an international conference is but one of a number of mechanisms within the practice of multilateral diplomacy to open up an issue for public scrutiny. Women's human rights activists have identified a major hiatus that exists between 'women's mechanisms' and the 'mainstream mechanisms'. The clarification of the term "mainstream", especially within the UN's framework, would assist in assessing this hiatus. "Mainstream" refers to the instruments, committees, programmes and procedures that the Centre for Human Rights and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights attends to. These two bodies comprise various committees that attend to all the key human rights treaties (excluding CEDAW), investigate violations, deals with complaints and research procedures that emanate from the 'mainstream'. If a mainstream exists, then what is known as a 'periphery' also exists (Ibid.: 283).

The 'periphery' also has instruments, bodies and procedures that deal only with women's issues. These are: the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The issue of women, on the one hand, and the mainstream on the other, is what a number of feminists are debating about, i.e. the capacity of international human rights law to adequately embrace the

basic rights of women to life, liberty, security and dignity. Specialization has given way to marginalisation - to the detriment of the entire system. Up to the present, women's issues still remain on the sideline of the UN's activities, which focus on the protection and promotion of human rights (Ibid.: 284).

Where are the women?

Cynthia Enloe (1989) and other feminist critics of IR ask the question: **Where are the women in IR?** By asking this question and by making a positive contribution to the study of international relations, feminists have made womankind visible. This question has also exposed gender relations as power relations. Compared to men, women play different roles in different relations to the military, the market and ordinary politics. Hence women and gender relations occur alongside each other. For instance, they are less represented in the spheres of formal politics and as heads of state, and are more likely to play an organisational role in other political spheres, in social movements and in NGO's. Women became actors in global politics long before their absence became a global issue, i.e. the fact that they were not actively participating in politics. The international élites were the men and their states that held power in international politics and made decisions on behalf of all people. After the end of the Second World War the international élites entrenched gendered hierarchies of international power. Motherhood was elevated to a political level, political legitimacy had to encompass feminine respectability, and white women were to be the political mentors of all other women (Enloe 1989: 18). During wartime, men were considered to be brave soldiers, protecting the women, who weeping waited as they sent more sons off to war. Here men were active agents of the nation and women were passive, regardless of what they were contributing. Women were seen as unreliable citizens, because they were relegated from the realm of reason, to the realm of emotions - something that distracted men. Those women who did make it into the corridors of power as state actors, have had no effect on the prevailing gender ideologies and divisions. They are known as "steel magnolias" and by observing the typical masculine leadership style they simply blended in. Ex-Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher, is a prime example of a 'steel magnolia'.

Asking where the women are, is one aspect of the question, but another equally important aspect is where the women should be. This is the real focal point. As most of the world's refugee populations are female, then it would make sense to have these women refugees actively participating in planning (understanding their distinctive needs) and implementing gender programmes designed for refugees. What about the role of women in the peace process? Just as they are needed in social and development programmes, so they are needed in peace and reconciliation programmes. In 1997 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) started a peace-building, inter-agency workshop for African grass-roots movements. Women's peace missions to Somalia and Sierra Leone were conducted in 1999. In addition, conflict-resolution and negotiation skills training courses were presented for women, to enable them to be prepared for action anywhere.

7 BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN WOMEN AND THE MAINSTREAM

Much work has been done to bridge the gap that exists between women and the mainstream, especially within the UN. Resolutions have been passed by the General Assembly, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Human Rights, as well as its Sub-Commission, that support and encourage the integration of women into the UN's general human rights work. For example in 1994 the Commission on Human Rights appointed a Special Rapporteur to investigate the extent of violence against women. As a group, various investigatory bodies have contemplated how a gender perspective can be incorporated into their work. Investigations have resulted in a number of committees revising their methods of work and issuing gender-sensitive guidelines to states, for when they compile their reports (Gallagher 1997: 286). In July 1995 the UN organised, as a preamble to the Beijing Conference in September, a meeting of high-level experts to draft guidelines for incorporating this gender perspective into the international human rights system. Even major international NGO's have now begun to exhibit a willingness to deal with the issue.

In July 1995 the UN organised a meeting of high-level experts to discuss how to incorporate a much-needed gender perspective into the international human rights system. This meeting resulted in an evolution of objectives and methodologies. Mainstreaming, in the sense of

merely 'adding' the issue of women to an agenda developed into what is termed as, "transformative mainstreaming".

At the time of the Vienna Conference, the concept of mainstreaming women into the system essentially meant to "merely add women" and did not mean to "scrutinize the machinery of the system". Transformative mainstreaming[5] moved to incorporate the term 'gender' into the 'women' debate, i.e. such a change in focus would allow for differentiation amongst women (race, class, culture, religion or ethnicity as core factors), as well as amongst the sexes. Transformative mainstreaming thus maintains a strict focus on how society influences opportunities for all. In this instance a gender perspective concept is based on the following two factors: **First**, that a perspective of interpreting reality is present at all times; and **second**, that up to now, a male view has always represented reality. Women's experiences and opinions have been literally ignored. A thorough understanding of how the exercise and enjoyment of human rights is adversely affected by the roles of the sexes (which have been socially constructed) would also be achieved when applying a gender perspective. Without any doubt, a sure method of securing equality and basic dignity for women around the world is through proper human rights discourse and through the better utilisation of human rights institutions. To marginalize any one group is detrimental to that particular group's mission of securing basic rights to which its members are entitled to under international law (Ibid.: 288 – 289).

Anne Gallagher in her 1997 article, "Ending the Marginalisation: Strategies for Incorporating Women into the UN Human Rights System", offered the following preliminary recommendations and conclusions: In the context of the advancement of women's rights, it would be desirable, therefore, to focus attention on these recommendations, hopefully then to arrive at a final assessment of how to bridge this gap between women and the mainstream.

---

[5] Transformative mainstreaming moves beyond "merely adding women" (i.e. a simple incorporation). It focuses on a qualitative change in the way that these institutions operate, as well as a reappraisal of the existing laws and procedures.

(i)   Integration policy

A clear policy must be formulated on the integration of a gender perspective into the current human rights system. Such a policy would eliminate any confusion that may exist regarding exactly what the problem is and what the proposed solutions are. This policy should be made known to the UN's highest levels and be accepted by the relevant political organs. Any token responses, such as the mere establishment of a 'women's office' in order to address problems that occur within the mainstream Human Rights Secretariat, without ensuring that such a mechanism can effectively deal with problems, must be totally discouraged. The ideal solution to these problems is that a gender unit would be anything else than a monitoring device should be discouraged.

(ii)   Guidelines that are realistic and detailed

Suitable guidelines on how to integrate a gender perspective should be developed by all bodies that constitute the UN human rights system. Broad directives could be used across the board, but each sector will need its own appropriate plan. Legitimacy must be obtained from the official integration policy. Realistic and detailed guidelines mean that all interested parties fully understand and are able to achieve these common goals of integration into the system.

(iii)   Gender should be adequately addressed

Gender - and specifically women's rights - must be taken into account, as regards human rights aspects, as well as the analysis of causes and dealing with violations. All reports and publications must contain no 'linguistic biases'. The methods used to investigate violations and those employed to compile information must be honestly and critically reviewed. Research should strive to develop gendered explanations of such violations. To merely identify violations is not adequate enough (Ibid.:330).

(iv)   Gender issue training

Policies, plans and implementation guidelines have little significance if staff had not been properly trained to be gender sensitive and to translate sensitive policies into practice. For example, when working with refugees and victims of sexual violence, UN volunteers and staff should be appropriately sensitized and trained to adequately assist such victims. In certain cultures female victims would rather not be assisted than have to relate their experience to a male stranger, even though he is employed in the UN.

(v)   All talk and no action

There is always a distinct possibility that policies, guidelines and training programmes become an end in itself. The integration process should be monitored constantly, hence the Beijing +5 special session in June 2000. Monitoring within the UN system should be done by having follow-up sessions, such as the Beijing +5 that was held in June 2000. All the governments who initially ratified the **Beijing Platform for Action** should be monitored and given the opportunity to either justify their action or non-action as regards the implementation of the guidelines. All parties who are responsible for such monitoring need to be accountable and thus given special powers to deal with all violations or non-implementation. The CSW is the main monitoring body for the implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action**.

(vi)   Role of the political bodies of the United Nations

The Commission on Human Rights must accept its role of defining mandates in a manner that highlights the consideration of gender issues and the monitoring of the performance of the various mechanisms. The effective coordination of women's rights would eliminate confusion regarding role allocation, i.e. the roles of the various parts of the mainstream, as opposed to the roles of the mainstream and the periphery. NGO's should be encouraged to play an active part in supporting programmes that aim to integrate a gender perspective.

This can be achieved by ensuring that the functions of their organization are well-integrated into the overall goals of the integration process.

(vii)   Head count of women in human rights system

There should be a proportional representation of women throughout the human rights system, since it is currently alarmingly low. The UN Secretariat is still struggling to apply gender equality on the basis of sex. An increase in the number of diverse women from all over the world is vital and would ensure a genuine gender perspective. It is pointless for the UN to issue guidelines for transformation, while not being totally transformed as an organisation.

(viii)   Integration not at the expense of women's mechanisms

Women's human rights can be promoted and protected most effectively at an international legal level by means of a combination of mainstream, specialist instructions and procedures. The streamlining of efforts towards the strengthening of those specialist bodies that deal with gender based violations should be encouraged.

(ix)   High Commission for Human Rights

The UNHCR post was created when the General Assembly adopted resolution 48/141 in 1993. This resolution highlighted the progress in the global recognition that the protection and promotion of human rights is a legitimate concern for the international community. The High Commissioner must ensure the promotion and protection of all human rights. This is one of the responsibilities assigned to the Commission (Ayala-Lasso in Boisard and Chossudovsky 1998: 293). Any action taken by the Commissioner is crucial to the success of the integration process. The Commissioner must ensure that all bureaucratic obstacles to the integration of gender be removed as soon as possible. He should also ensure that the mandate is meaningful to the world's women (Gallagher 1997: 328-332).

Historical evidence confirms that the concerns of women have been ignored or sidelined. The mainstream international human rights community has begun to alter its methods of dealing with problems. An overall indication of willingness, albeit in principle, to integrate this gender perspective into its work is encouraging, but inadequate. The steps to be taken to implement policy (i.e. the steps discussed by Anne Gallagher and indicated above) must still be taken seriously. The UN's marginalisation of women's rights is a clear indication of the position women occupy globally. This is the tragedy. The next step for women's human rights activists is to challenge the basic validity of the laws, institutions and practices that claim to protect all human rights.

8   CONCLUSION

Women's rights are human rights. Violence against women – rape, female genital mutilation, trafficking in women and domestic violence - must end! This statement should suffice as the conclusion to this chapter. However the process to change this current state of affairs, is ongoing and far from complete. Although progress is slow, it is determined. Violations against women's human rights were shrouded in a culture of silence, shame and mostly indifference. In many cultures the attitude is that rape victims possibly invited it; or that a victim of domestic violence probably deserved it because she was giving her husband trouble. What is being done to remedy the situation?

In this chapter, the question was raised, **Where are the women**? In attempting to provide an answer to both where women are, where they should be, another question arose. That question is why should the advancement of women's rights be dealt with? Some women have coped with the undesirable situation by blending into the corridors of masculine power earning the name, 'steel magnolias'. In the African experience women are now being trained to participate in development, as well as in peace and conflict resolution, tactics. The point is, however, that, wherever the women are, that they maintain who they are.
By briefly focusing on the four schools of feminist thought, the whole matter regarding women's rights as human rights is given a theoretical framework. Each school of feminist

thought has its own theory on what constitutes human rights - which highlights the complexity of the concept of human rights.

A powerful factor in the debate on whether women's rights are human rights or not, is the question of culture. As human rights are generally deemed to be a Western concept, it thus cannot be universally applied to all cultures. The impact of enforcing one culture on another, e.g. when the colonialisation of Africa removed the rights from women in Africa and replaced them with gendered divisions of labour. The culture issue also poses pertinent questions to the international community on the public *versus* the private domain, whenever human rights violations occur. Cultural belief systems are interwoven with religious beliefs, which reinforce the oppression of women and stereotyping.

After the end of the Cold War, no-one expected the vacuum left in its the wake to be filled with even more horrendous tales of violations to women's human rights, especially to those women who live in the formed Soviet Union. Global issues, such as refugees, pollution and bombed villages, are not new to the study of international relations. However, what is new is the realisation of how these issues are gendered and what it means to be a woman refugee. It necessitates an entirely new approach to those who discuss these problems and how they should be solved.

Then the silence was broken! The shift in perspective from security-awareness to humanitarian-awareness prompted hundreds of thousands of women from all over the world to initiate demonstrations and campaigns. They started talking openly about rape, domestic violence and used the mass media to call attention to violence against women. Women were now free from the culture of silence surrounding violence against them, they gave the crime a name and found a language of liberation. The global political community was shown how to look at the world thorough a woman's eyes (Bunch and Yoon 2000: 1-2).

There is also the added complexity of the international human rights system and how women's rights as human rights have gradually begun to appear on international agendas.

Once the problem of the absence or non-existence of women's rights on the global agenda was recognised, the next hurdle to be faced was how to eliminate marginalisation, i.e. to change the mainstream international human rights structures. The validity of laws, institutions and practices that claimed to protect all human rights was being challenged.

In 1975 the UN called for the first International Women's Year. This event was followed by the UN Decade for Women. During the early 1990's, massive UN conferences were held, where women exchanged their views and ideas. They transcended their cultures and nationalities, bringing their experiences to the global agendas of the world. Their experiences, as well as the implementation of what was debated at these conferences, forms the subject matter of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS – MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY AT WORK

1   INTRODUCTION

Since 1975 the UN's world summits for women 'galvanized' the international women's movement. Women and world development are linked as global issues. The primary aim of this chapter is to analyse how the UN's world summits have placed women on the global agenda since 1975.

A thorough focus on gender mainstreaming is given in this chapter. Gender mainstreaming as a concept; its relevance to the UN as an institution; and the advancement of women's rights will be analysed in this chapter. Three definitions regarding what constitutes gender mainstreaming are discussed. Gender mainstreaming is a new concept and is regarded with much suspicion. Many do not understand what it entails. The importance, however, of gender mainstreaming cannot be disputed as a means to advance women's rights. A misunderstanding of this concept could prove to be a major stumbling block to the advancement of women's rights and could even possibly derail the process in its entirety.

The international women's movement and its relationship with the UN is another vital aspect of this chapter.   Taken that both the movement and the UN share the common characteristic of 'people being united and sharing a common goal', the international women's movement and the UN in working together stand the chance of successfully promoting the advancement of women. The progress made towards advancing women's rights at Beijing will form the main focus of this chapter. The UN has set up major bodies and implemented instruments to advance women's rights. The role of the NGO's, as actors on the global stage, is crucial in the advancement of women's rights. An analysis of the bodies and instruments established by the UN to advance women's rights is another important aspect of this study.

What are the duties of the member states who ratify these conventions at the major conferences? It is necessary to focus on what the South African government has set up, i.e. the national machinery. There must be a flow of action from the conference table to the millions of women all over the world: words must be translated into action.

2   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1   Gender equality

Gender equality is attained when there is an acceptance of the differences between women and men, taking into account the diverse roles each play in society. Gender equality grants the right to be different, whether it be a difference in class, political opinion, religion, ethnicity, race or sexual orientation. Gender equality also pertains to how those structures in society that perpetuate unequal power relationships should be changed to achieve a more favourable balance between female/male values and priorities (Gender Mainstreaming Report 1998: 4). The most crucial achievement in gender equality is a growing awareness of the need for and the willingness to promote gender equality. There is also a growing awareness of the role men need to play in achieving gender equality. Despite this progress, new forms of inequality have begun to develop. There is also an increasing awareness of the diversity amongst women themselves, especially in post-Cold War Europe.

2.2   Targets for gender equality

According to the Gender Mainstreaming Report (compiled by a group of specialists on mainstreaming and set up by the Council of Europe in 1995), the following are targets for gender equality:

- The recognition of women's rights as human rights. The human rights of women and men must be respected and promoted. Respecting women's rights as human rights. This target includes taking action against factors, such as forced prostitution or pornography, which may interfere with women's freedom and dignity.

- Encouraging and developing representative democracy by including women in decision-making. Both women and men must participate in all decisions taken in a society, as both have their particular life perspectives and experiences.

- Once individuals have attained economic independence, equal access to credit and equal opportunities in the labour market becomes crucial. Another crucial factor linked to the balance of power between women and men, is their position in the economy.

- Equally empowering boys and girls *via* the education system. Education is the means to transfer norms, knowledge and skills through out society.

- Encouraging women and men to share the responsibility of removing gender inequalities. For example, by effecting specific changes in legislation to allow men to become involved in child-rearing issues. The Basic Conditions of Service Act state that women and men have a shared responsibility in removing gender inequalities existing in society. This Act has made it possible for South African men to take family responsibility leave. (Gender Mainstreaming Report 1998: 5).

2.3   Gender mainstreaming

Various definitions of gender mainstreaming are available. The concept first appeared in development issues. The group of specialists on mainstreaming, as set up by the Council of Europe, defined gender mainstreaming as follows:

"Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making" (Gender Mainstreaming Report 1998: 10).

The UNDP defined gender mainstreaming as, "taking account of gender concerns in all policy, programmes, administrative and financial activities, and in organizational procedures, thereby contributing to a profound organizational transformation" (UNDP. Gender and good practices 2000: 2).

ECOSOC views gender mainstreaming as ,"mainstreaming a gender perspective in order to assess the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs in any area and at all levels." It entails the evaluation and monitoring of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally. Its main aim is to achieve gender equality (Ibid.: 3).

All three definitions, discussed for the purpose of this study, refer to transformation within policies and programmes, within specific structures. Gender equality and the attainment thereof is the common goal. There are potential stumbling blocks in the pursuit of mainstreaming a gender perspective that could 'derail' the process. These are:

- Misunderstanding the concept, i.e. What does "gender mainstreaming" involve?. It is possible that gender mainstreaming may be regarded to be a new strategy to replace existing gender equality policies. A lack of information may be the cause of this misconception.

- Gender equality, as well as the concept of equality itself, is often misunderstood. Equality is a moral issue, and to agree on a moral issue is not an easy task. Equality should be promoted by positive actions and should imply that women and men are free individuals. Equality *de facto* relates to women and men's rights being respected for their diversity and difference (Gender Mainstreaming Report 1998: 12).

- Current policy-making approaches need to be changed to accommodate this proposed change. Cooperation between policy departments needs to be enhanced, especially between the existing structures of policy-making and the new external political actors, such as the NGO's.

- A lack of tools and techniques makes it necessary to develop new tools and to modify existing techniques, for example the collection of statistical data needs to incorporate gender as an extra variable (Ibid.: 13).

- Ignorance may prevail concerning what constitutes a gender equality issue. The capacity of policy-makers and learning processes needs to be improved. Should too few women be involved in decision-making, this may result in the reproduction of the existing *status quo*.

- There is a real danger of theory not being put into practice. Governments may enthusiastically support gender mainstreaming initiatives, but take no further action. The concept of gender mainstreaming is both topical and fashionable. Gender mainstreaming is simply a means to the end, which is gender equality (Ibid.:3).

2.4 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

CEDAW was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and is aptly described as an international bill of rights for women. Since the Convention was affected in September 1981, 139 UN member states have ratified it. Discrimination against women was defined as an issue and an agenda drawn up for national action to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women. The Convention provides the platform to achieve equality between women and men by ensuring that women have equal access to and equal opportunities in the political and public domains. Once a country has ratified the Convention, it is legally bound to adhere to it and to put it into practice. Such a country is also committed reporting back on its progress as regards the measures it has taken to comply with its treaty obligations (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979: 1).

2.5 Special Session

The Special Session is an extraordinary meeting of the General Assembly convened for a specific purpose, *viz.* to review the progress after a major UN global conference (Women Watch. UN Frequently Asked Questions n.d.1-4).

3 RELEVANCE OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender mainstreaming is an important strategy and is beneficial particularly owing to the following factors:

- At the core of policy-making are people. The well being of women and men should thus always be taken into account. Politicians and public opinion will embark on a learning process and will take cognizance of how policies affect the lives of all citizens. New items on the agenda will enhance the quality of their policy-making strategies (Gender Mainstreaming Report 1998: 14).

- The quality of governance and government would improve. The policy process would require greater transparency and openness by disputing the assumption that policies are gender neutral.

- The entire spectrum of human resources (women and men) would be made proper use of. Mainstreaming would ensure that the experiences of women and men would contribute to removing imbalances in society.

- Gender equality issues would be brought out into the open. These issues would be more visible and integrated into the mainstream of society, instead of marginalising them, as was the situation previously.

- Mainstreaming recognises the differences between women and men, and the fact that they do not form a homogenous group. In contrast to this, the Liberal Feminists

measure the equality of all people in terms of a male norm (Gender Mainstreaming Report 1998: 14).

Gender equality, gender mainstreaming, as well as the relevance thereof, indicate the basic what, how and why of the process of mainstreaming women's rights into, for example, the UN human rights regime. A 'language' has been developed and is being used to advance the status of women. A mandate for integration has been well established, particularly with the help of the international women's movement and the UN's world summits. The mode of language that has developed (refer to the Whorf hypothesis mentioned earlier) is that rape is now considered to be a war crime and is therefore a social responsibility, devoid of indifference. The realisation and articulation of the fact that women constitute at least 80% of the global refugee population has dramatically altered the manner in which the international community deals with the refugee problem (UN Funding and Donor Relations. 1999: 1-3). Thus, by mainstreaming a different perspective into the policy process, the problem of dealing with global issues correctly would be properly addressed.

The definition regarding the difference between gender and sex given in the previous chapter needs to be noted. Sex pertains to social differences, and gender to biological differences between women and men. This is what gender equality means, i.e. that these differences between women and men must be 'accepted'. A basic human right is that the difference between women and men should be accepted and acknowledged. The various feminist schools of thought do not all agree on the meaning of gender equality. Liberal feminist theorists stress that we are all equal. Thence, the radical feminists criticism of: Equal to whom? The liberal feminists do not acknowledge this difference, i.e. how the advancement of women's rights should function. Postmodern feminists do not seek equality, whether or not equality pertains to 'equal treatment for equals' or due process for all. Generally feminists question whether the term "equality" means anything more than being the same according to a male norm (Flax 1992: 196).

Gender equality means acknowledging that women's rights are human rights and that women's rights must therefore be, not only recognised, but also advanced. Preconditions for

the advancement of women's rights include that women should be brought into the structures, be made economically independent and be educated. Gender mainstreaming pertains to exactly how gender equality and advancement of women's rights are achieved. To mainstream gender necessitates a (re)organisation of how the policy-making process is runs its course. This requirement is linked to what the radical feminists have to say, i.e. that the current policy-making set-up is patriarchal, which is why women's rights are not being properly advanced. If there is any doubt, whatsoever, about the exact nature of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, there is a real danger of jeopardising the advancement of women's rights.

The process of advancing women's rights is not an easy task. Advancing women's rights is taken seriously by those who consider it important and ignored by those who don't share the same view. Ignorance on the part of women and men as regards what constitutes the advancement of women's rights also impedes progress. As a result of a number of conferences held concerning women's rights as human rights, a significant language has been developed. A language would eliminate the ignorance surrounding the extent of violations or what constitutes a woman's right. People would know what is meant when it is stated that a women's right is a human right. Women will never be able to exercise their full political, economic and human rights until all obstacles that are gender-specific, are addressed by those who are responsible for protecting all human rights (Riddel-Dixon 1999: 150). A major problem in the process is that there is no official overseer that has been appointed to monitor the activity of mainstreaming. To ensure a smooth mainstreaming process, the following three recommendations are made.

Firstly, in order to promote women's rights, **information on the extent of the violations of women's rights should be available**, i.e. the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data. The extent of human rights violations is influenced by gender. Gender-based analysis would give meaning to the data collected by applying it to existing and new human rights documents (Ibid.: 155).

Secondly, appropriate and effective **responses to violations of women's rights** must be developed. Accountability is essential to the success of the processes of incorporating women's rights into the UN's human rights system. Once the violations have been identified, strategies to deal with them should be addressed, and a follow-up study on the effectiveness of the response needs to be undertaken (Ibid.: 155).

The **third** recommendation, which really applies to the entire UN system, is that there should be **better coordination and cooperation among the human rights bodies**. This would ensure an improvement in both the quality and quantity of the collaboration between the UN's human rights bodies (Ibid.: 156). There should be no doubt as to when, how and what needs to be done within the UN to ensure an effective and successful mainstreaming process.

4 THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND THE UNITED NATIONS

In clarification of what is meant by the "international women's movement", it is necessary to juxtapose it with what is known as, "**women's movements"**. To speak of the latter in the plural, raises questions on the shared commonality of the various groups. On the other hand, the **women's movement** may attribute too much unity to what can be regarded as a plurality of activities and approaches, which are characterized by class, culture and region. For the purpose of this section, the term "international women's movement" successfully connotes the notion of plurality, relates well to the idea of a common goal and to how women are organized globally. Women's groups are being organised, with a high degree of consensus, which should characterize the preparation stages for these world conferences.

The international women's movement primarily comprises political parties, local, national, regional and international NGO's, including individual women and male members. A wide variety of institutions, such as governmental agencies, donor agencies, academic groups, business groups and religious groups, constitute the membership of the international women's movement. The history of NGO's lobbying the international community on issues

of concern to women predates the UN. A number of pre-Second World War NGO's put forward a proposal to prohibit sexual slavery. This proposal was not adopted (the outbreak of the war, probably diverted certain attentions). When the UN was formed in 1948, the issue resurfaced, and by 1949 the Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of others were both adopted (Chen 1995: 491).

By adopting international laws and treaties on women's rights, the UN has forged a common standard for measuring how societies promote equality between women and men. There are currently twelve international instruments, *viz.* conventions and declarations of particular importance to the advancement of women's rights. They have been adopted by the UN's General Assembly and are legally binding for countries that have ratified them. CEDAW, as an example, has been ratified by 162 states. Some states ratified with reservations, thereby limiting their obligations to implement CEDAW. The various reservations vary in scope. They mainly concern possible conflicts of interest between CEDAW and customary or religious laws. Reservations have doubled the work of NGO's (especially women NGO's) because, once ratification has taken place, they have to focus on removing the constraints that these reservations have imposed on the application of CEDAW.

(i) The Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952).

The Convention on the Political Rights of Women commits member states to allow women to vote and hold public office.

(ii) The Convention on the Consent to Marriage (1962).

The Convention of the Consent to Marriage decrees that the consent of both parties to a marriage is necessary.

(iii)   The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) (UN Actions for Women 14 September 2000).

CEDAW is regarded as being the international bill of rights for women. (Refer to the conceptual framework in this chapter.)

(iv)   Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993).

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women deems violence against women as "one of the crucial mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men" (Women Watch. The UN Working for Women n.d.: 1-3).

(v)   Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergencies and Armed Conflicts (1974).

The Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergencies and Armed Conflicts acknowledges that women and children are the victims of inhuman acts and consequently suffer serious harm during armed conflicts. The plight of women and children needs special attention during these conflicts.

(vi)   Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1967).

The Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women states that "discrimination against women, denying or limiting as it does their equality of rights with men, is fundamentally unjust and constitutes an offence against human dignity".

(vii)   Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1960).

Adopted by UNESCO, the Convention against Discrimination in Education ensures equal educational opportunities for girls and women.

(viii)   Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (1958).

The Discrimination Convention promotes equal rights for women and men in the work place.

(ix)   ILO Equal Remuneration Convention (1951).

The importance of the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention is that it establishes the principle and practice of equal work for equal pay.

(x)   Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949).

The Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others calls for the punishment of those procuring others for prostitution (Women Watch. The UN working for women. a. n.d.: 1-3)

The UN has proven to be an extremely efficient instrument of multilateral diplomacy for galvanizing the international women's movement. Women have begun to recognize the importance of using this forum to voice women's perspectives, not only at special conferences for women, but also at all other major conferences. Other NGO-led movements, such as the human rights and environmental groups, have also seen the value of voicing their concerns, by making use of the UN as a form of multilateral diplomacy. These two particular areas of global issues are connected to the advancement of women's rights.

Women's issues have been dealt with at other recent UN conferences, *viz.* **Habitat II, Istanbul (1996);** the **World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen 1995;** the **International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo (1994);** the **UN Conference on Human Rights, Vienna (1993)** and the **UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Rio de Janeiro (1992)**.

5 THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS THROUGH WORLD SUMMITS

As the Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan's strategic position and influence on the advancement of women's rights should not be underestimated. On many occasions he has been recorded as championing the advancement of women's rights - especially within the UN. Kofi Annan had the following to say about the UN's global issues and their relationship with women.

"I cannot think of one single issue we deal with in the UN that is not a women's issue. Women are every bit as much affected as any man by peace and security, by human security and by human rights. It is, therefore, right and indeed necessary that women should be there to work towards these goals, with equal strength and in equal numbers" (UN Document. Women in the UN 2000: 1).

In the past twenty-five years, both the UN's structures and the UN's actual perspective on women have changed dramatically. NGO's have increased in numbers and influence beyond any expectation, and the leadership of the NGO movement has shifted to the women of the southern hemisphere, i.e. developing countries from the women of the northern hemisphere.

A world conference, particularly at the UN, usually comprises two separate (but related) conferences: the official UN conference and the NGO forum. The former is usually where government delegations officially meet to negotiate policies and documents. The latter is where NGO's meet, talk about their experiences and discuss new ways of dealing with issues. This is real multilateral diplomacy at work.

5.1 Key strategies in the preparatory process

The NGO-led women's movement developed a number of key strategies to enable them to participate, especially in the preparatory process. An example of a 'women' NGO is, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). Its members constitute a

network of scholars and activists from the southern hemisphere, i.e. mainly the developing countries. It was established before the Nairobi Conference. Its primary aim is to articulate alternative development strategies (Chen 1995: 480).

(i)   Global campaigns were mobilised. Women's NGO's called for local-level dialogue and action. They lobbied at both the national and international level. Information on abuses committed against women was gathered and assessed. They stressed the necessity of attending meetings, whether at local, national, regional or international levels.

(ii)   Coalitions and consensus building were undertaken. Through strategic meetings women's NGO's ensure that women (as individuals and through NGO's) networked at all levels.

(iii)   These women's NGO's realised that, in order to influence the existing policy-makers, they would have to draft their own versions of policies and documents.

(iv)   The position of national governments and the composition of official delegations had to be influenced. Women's NGO's achieved this by publishing reports, lobbying and nominating women to these male-only delegations.

(v)   The women's caucus was a mechanism or instrument that bridged the NGO and official deliberations. All policy-making meetings allocated time for NGO's to caucus with official delegates and policy-makers (Chen 1995: 489).

The concept of the UN's International Women's Year for 1975 was submitted by two official women representatives to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, *viz.* Florica Andrei, the Romanian representative, and Helri Sipila, the Finnish representative, who was later appointed as the first female Assistant Secretary-General. As a point of interest, this was the first of the UN theme years. The concept of the UN's International Women's Year developed into the UN Decade of Women. This development exceeded all expectations,

since it introduced a new 'women's era' to the UN and resulted in the birth of a global women's movement (Chen 1995: 478).

5.2   Women's rights and the United Nations: 1975-1985

During this decade the UN hosted a number of world summits, focused specifically on advancing the rights of women. The UN made use of the conference procedure to bring attention to the global issue of advancing women's rights.

(i)   The First World Conference on Women (Mexico City 1975)

During the UN's International Women's Year in 1975, the First World Conference on Women was held in Mexico City. The attendance at the NGO forum of more than 6 000 women exceeded the attendance by non-official participants. This attendance is greater than at any previous UN world conference. The official conference was attended by 133 member states. At this conference, the first document that addressed the rights of women, the World Plan of Action, was adopted. In this document issues related to food, health, education and political participation are dealt with. Feminist critics labelled this document a 'shopping list' of women's issues (Chen 1995: 478). However, in truth, it succeeded in launching a new era in global efforts to promote the advancement of women by introducing a worldwide dialogue on gender equality.   This process comprised aspects, such as deliberation, negotiation, setting objectives, identifying obstacles and reviewing the progress made. Mexico City spelt the following three objectives out for the UN:

- Full gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination.
- Women in development, to include integration and full participation.
- An increased presence of women in promoting world peace (UN Document. Women 2000. The Four Global Women's Conferences 2000: 1).

A change in how women were perceived in terms of international relations occurred with the adoption of the outcome document, *The World Plan of Action*, from the Mexico City

conference in 1975. Previously, in international relations, women were perceived either as non-existent or they were perceived to be present only as passive recipients of support and assistance. However, after the outcome document was adopted, they were accorded the status of being full and equal partners with men, with equal rights to resources and opportunities across the board. Another change in attitude that occurred was the link between women and development. Development was first viewed as serving to advance women. A later approach maintained that development could not take place without the full participation of women. Important institutional changes in the UN that were prompted by the activities in Mexico City were: the establishment of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). INSTRAW AND UNIFEM provided the institutional framework for research, training and operational activities, by focusing on women and development. For the first time women were actively engaging in multilateral discussions regarding their rights. Of the 133 state delegations present, at least 84% were headed by women. The NGO forum, the International Women's Year Tribune, was also organized by women and was attended by 4 000 participants (Ibid.: 2).

At the 1975 Mexico City Conference an interesting clash of interests occurred, which highlighted what the real issues for women were at the time. Western women focused intensively on issues of equality, while the women from the Eastern bloc preferred to discuss real issues of peace and development. The women from the developing world focused on development. The Forum had a difficult task on hand, but managed to set the 'wheels in motion' in an attempt to unite the women's movement. This movement became truly international in 1985. As for changes that have occurred within the UN in the past twenty-five years, the Forum has rendered the UN more accessible to the NGO's, especially those who provided a means for women to have their voices heard (Ibid.: 2).

(ii)   Second World Conference on Women (Copenhagen 1980)

To celebrate the midpoint of the decade, a second World Conference on Women was held in Copenhagen in 1980. A milestone for this particular conference was the adoption of one of

the most significant instruments for women's equality, CEDAW, which (as previously mentioned) is considered a bill of rights for women. Besides this major feat at Copenhagen, a significant realization was the fact that, after securing these rights at the conference tables, women were unable to exercise those rights at home, i.e. the problem of implementing theory in practice. To counteract this problem - particularly in relation to the three goals of (refer to Mexico City) peace, equality and development - three areas of action were identified, *viz.* equal access to education, employment opportunities and basic healthcare services (Ibid.: 3). Although political tensions were present at the conference, the NGO Forum was able to interact successfully, finding common ground despite all their differences. Copenhagen proved to cover a wider variety of issues concerning development and women. Delegates were now making better use of the multilateral diplomatic instrument, i.e. the world summit (Chen 1995: 479).

(iii)   The Third World Conference on Women (Nairobi 1985)

The Third World Conference on Women, which was held in 1985 in Nairobi (Kenya), heralded the end of the Decade. The final document of the Nairobi conference, *Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women*, provided an analytical framework and prescriptive measures - in other words: the what and how to overcome any obstacles that hinder the advancement of women. This document was unanimously adopted without reservations. Governments needed to set their own priorities, based on their development policies and capabilities regarding resources. Three basic criteria were identified: constitutional and legal steps, equality in social participation, equality in political participation and decision-making. The increase in the number and variety of women's NGO's, as well as the assortment of alliances, networks and coalitions that united these NGO's, was considered to be the most obvious success of the decade at the multilateral level. The number of women who attended Mexico City, Copenhagen and Nairobi was small compared to the thousands of women who (as a result of this 'awakening') began mobilizing themselves globally. These new groups at local, national, regional, international level were involved in providing welfare for women, orienting women for change and doing research on the lives and the work of women, thereby advocating change for women. These

groups represented various types of ideologies, *viz.* religious, secular, radical, conservative, grassroots and elitism (Chen 1995: 479).

The main purpose of these groups was to unite women, bringing them together to share information and to develop alternative strategies to further their main goal, i.e. the advancement of women's rights. Another advantage of how the Decade of Women was organized and handled at multilateral level was that women got to know each other better and their problems were better understood. The UN could no longer overlook the challenges concerning women and development anymore. During the 1980's the international women's movement was successful in achieving consensus and coalitions concerning all issues declared to be women's issues, i.e. particularly the environment, human rights and population (Chen 1995: 480).

The Nairobi Conference is regarded as the occasion of the true 'birth of global feminism', since it was during this conference that the movement for gender equality gained true global recognition. Women had to participate in decision-making, which is their legitimate right and a social and political necessity and which needed to be incorporated in all institutions of society. Nairobi widened the scope for the advancement of women in society: It was no longer an isolated issue, but featured in every sphere of human activity. The conferences held up until the early 1990's reinforced the realization that women needed to be involved in decision-making. Yet, the basic structures of inequality that existed in the relationship between women and men remained unaffected. Men were still making decisions that affected all people's lives. Putting theory into practice, i.e. involving women in decision-making and subsequently implementing decisions made at conference tables into policy-making processes which could be of significance to the women of the world, was still problematic. It was only at the Fourth World Conference on Women (held in Beijing in 1995) that the real struggle for gender equality began (UN Document. Women 2000. The Four Global Women's Conferences 2000:3).

5.3   Beijing 1995: Placing gender on the global agenda

At Beijing a significant conceptual change occurred, i.e. from the concept of "women" to the concept of "gender". Society in its entirety - with all its relations and interactions between men and women - needed to be re-evaluated. The acceptance that in no possible way could women assume their rightful place as equal partners with men, in all spheres of life, unless society and its institutions underwent major re-structuring. Only then could the issue of women not be treated as an 'add-on' in any given situation. The multilateral Beijing forum and the significant magnitude thereof, sparked a renewed global commitment to the empowerment of women everywhere. It also captured a great deal of international attention concerning the cause. The milestone of the advancement of women for the 21st century is surely the **Beijing Declaration** and the **Beijing Platform for Action**, with its particular twelve critical areas of concern, *viz.* the main obstacles to the advancement of women. The **Beijing Declaration** and the **Beijing Platform for Action** is the outcome document from the Fourth World Conference held in Beijing in 1995. This document sets, as goals, gender equality, development and peace. It also sets an agenda for the empowerment of women. Twelve critical areas of concern were identified for taking priority action to achieve the advancement and empowerment of women. The main objective is the empowerment of all women, with a full realisation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (UN Document. Further Actions and Initiatives 2000: 1).

5.4   Main obstacles to the advancement of women's rights

The Beijing Declaration's twelve areas of concern actually spelt out the strategic objectives and actions to be taken by member governments, the international community, NGO's and the private sector. The purpose of these objectives is to facilitate the removal of obstacles to the advancement of women. These twelve areas are:

- Women and poverty
- The education and training of women
- Women and health

- Violence against women

- Women and armed conflict

- Women and the economy

- Women in power and decision-making

- Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

- Human rights of women

- Women and the media

- Women and the environment

- The girl-child

Those governments who adopted the **Beijing Platform for Action** committed themselves to including a gender perspective throughout all their institutions, policies, planning and decision-making. Any decision made or plan implemented, necessitated an analysis of the effects on/needs of both women and men. Gender mainstreaming would reconstruct the entire system (including its inequalities) and would benefit, not only women, but men as well (UN Document. Women 2000. The Four Global Women's Conferences: 5).

The UN General Assembly called on all states, the UN system, other international organizations, NGO's and the private sector to take official action. National mechanisms were set up within the structures of member states. The Office of the Status of Women (OSW) is an example of a central policy-coordinating unit established to mainstream a gender perspective throughout all institutions and programmes in South Africa. Beijing was the largest gathering of NGO and government representatives ever (17 000 in total). The NGO Forum exceeded all expectations regarding attendance figures, totaling over 47 000 participants. The NGO's became a greater driving force for gender equality and actually influenced the content of the **Beijing Platform for Action**. They also played an important role in ensuring that their national leaders were held accountable in respect of the commitments made to implement the Platform back home (Ibid.: 5).

5.5 **Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century (Beijing +5)**

At the Beijing conference the international women's movement and the participating governments had declared that they were determined to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women in the interests of humanity. The 21st century opened with the question: "Are these goals for women being met?" To answer this crucial question, the participants at the Special Session held in New York in June 2000, focused on the following questions:

- What obstacles still remain?
- What have the various governments done or not done?
- Which policies have been implemented since Beijing 1995?
- What national mechanisms/ministries have been specifically established?
- What have been the effects on globalisation on the outcomes of Beijing?
- How does a lack of funding and resources affect the implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action**?

The outcome document and political declaration of the Beijing +5 special session reaffirmed the obligation of governments to implement the decisions of the **Beijing Platform for Action**. The **Beijing Platform for Action** represents the reference point for governmental commitment to advance women's rights within the framework of the twelve critical areas of concern. The outcome document enhanced the **Beijing Platform for Action** to an extent, because it made actions more specific and added new issues to the agenda, for example, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its impact on girls and women.

The outcome document put forward new and stronger measures to combat violations of women's human rights, for example, zero tolerance when dealing with violence against women; the need to address negative traditional practices, including honour crimes (Ibid.: 2). By acknowledging the fact that structural transformation and economic transition has occurred globally in the past five years, new methods of focusing on global issues were

introduced. A gender perspective has also been introduced in programme budgets, which has resulted in greater attention to aspects of gender in the budgeting process.

The participants noted that, even though constitutions had been changed and new laws had been made, progress would be achieved only if the hearts of the people changed as well. Even women themselves must want to change and trust that the programmes are in their interest: hence the leadership and training motivation courses offered to women by the UN. As culture and religion are major barriers in some communities, education is a key factor in overcoming suspicions concerning 'the advancement of women's rights'. Traditional leaders in communities have been targeted as people who should be educated, since this would help to eradicate the problems of implementing the **Beijing Platform for Action**. All participants agreed to another crucial prerequisite for success, *viz.* that global peace should prevail. Global peace is essential to any proposed advancement of women (UN General Assembly Press Release. GA/9725 2000: 2-3).

6   FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN AT BEIJING AND BEYOND

Beijing 1995 is defined as a deliberative conference that from a theoretical perspective, served as a forum for the general discussion of matters of international concern, such as the issue of the advancement of women. What Beijing managed to achieve was to make specific recommendations regarding the policies of governments in the field of women's rights and gender equality, and how these recommendations should result in progressive action (Boisard and Chossudovsky 1998: 22).

Since the Mexico City Conference in 1975, each subsequent conference held has made progress in creating an awareness of the status of women's rights in the international community. The activities of the conference preparation stages, particularly for the Beijing 1995 conference and the Beijing +5 2000 special session, were crucial for the development and progress of the advancement of women's rights. The preparatory committee for the Beijing +5 adopted a draft political declaration, *viz.* that participating governments would reaffirm their commitment to the **Beijing Platform of Action** and the **Nairobi Forward-**

Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women.   They also pledged to ensure their full and accelerated implementation. Such a pledge would ensure no diversion and would keep them broadly focused on the issue under discussion. During this preparatory process a number of key challenges to the implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action** were identified, *viz.* the lack of financial and human resources, the disadvantages of globalisation and unequal access to improved communications technology - especially for women in developing countries.

A particular disadvantage pertaining to the issue of gender equality in the workplace is that societal inequities and stereotypical attitudes had made it difficult for women to create a balance between the domestic domain and the work place. The **Beijing Platform for Action** thus needs to move from the conference table, through the established national mechanisms and become mainstreamed into labour policies, e.g. the Employment Equity Act. Although governments willingly reaffirmed the fundamental right to equality on this multilateral forum, laws, which perpetuated discrimination as regards personal/economic/marital status and even recourse against violence, still remain intact. Laws and policies pertaining to gender equality must lead to action i.e. the theory must develop into practice (UN Press Release WOM/1194 2000: 1-4).

Preparing for a conference of this magnitude and covering an issue such as the advancement of women's rights is a daunting task. At Beijing, even the conference logistics drew attention: some delegates questioned China as the venue, owing to its poor record of human rights (or lack thereof). The venue for the NGO forum was held in Huairou (which means 'Be kind to the Barbarians') and much dissatisfaction was voiced concerning the distance between Huairou and Beijing (60 km). Such displays of dissatisfaction and other remarks could have resulted from a genuine concern, or they could have been intended to divert attention from the issues at hand. Signs of dissatisfaction such as these could affect the outcome of such a conference. The success of Beijing depended to a large extent on the fact that not only should women want the conference to succeed, but also men need to 'buy in'. Men and women should work together to ensure its success.

Key figures, such as Hilary Clinton (whose participation was confirmed only at the last minute), attended and agreed to speak at the conference, and her presence indicated the importance her government attached to the issue. Why did Bill Clinton, the then President of the United States of America, not attend the conference proceedings? Did he not consider the advancement of women issue to be important? President Carter approved CEDAW in 1980, but the treaty never reached the Senate floor for a vote. The Senate must approve the treaty by a two-thirds majority before it is accepted in US legislation. The reason for this twenty year delay is that the current chairperson of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has blocked the progress made on the treaty. In his opinion, the adoption of CEDAW may result in the broadening of abortion rights in the US (International Bill of Rights for Women: 1). This attitude is indicative of the pretexts still used to maintain control and to have a say on how women should or should not conduct their lives.

The choice of Beijing as a venue for a multilateral conference, particularly for a country such as the United States, became a significantly thorny diplomatic issue. The United States of America (USA) is well known to be China's greatest critic when it comes to human rights. The USA and its lobby groups used Beijing to focus on the violation of narrowly construed human rights in China. In an effort to divert the agenda, women's health rights were reduced to reproductive rights, which, in turn, were reduced to population control. An attempt was thus made to undermine the development of the international women's movement, by linking the reproductive rights of women to the conference in Cairo on population (Shiva 1995: 5).

6.1   An assessment of the global responses to Beijing 1995

Attending the Beijing +5 were various contingents from Africa, Europe, Asia-Pacific region, the Americas and religious representatives. The issue of women's rights is potentially a controversial topic in some communities. Culture and religion play an important role in how women's rights are dealt with. The **African** contingents reported back that many of them had opened up ministries for women's affairs and offices for the status of women (as in the case in South Africa) to deal with the implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action**.

They were most aware of the potential problems that cultures and traditions may pose and that plans were under way to deal with these stumbling blocks. Many of them noted the effects of globalisation on the women of Africa and how these contributed largely to the feminisation of poverty. The **European** delegates are noted to have made more demands regarding equality. What is important in their case, is that many of the NGO's, as well as those who hold key positions within the UN, fall within this category. Decision-making and the issue of sexual orientation were major concerns for them. **Eastern European** delegates focused sharply on the effects of war on women and children, hence their opinions regarding the full participation of women in the global peace processes. One should bear in mind that the African and Eastern European experiences differ somewhat to those of the **Western Europeans**. These experiences differ are mainly as regards the consequences of the former's experiences of war and poverty. Having not yet ratified certain conventions, the USA agreed on the proceedings, provided they were not legally binding (UN General Assembly Press Release. GA/9725 2000: 1-45).

The negative effects of globalisation on women were totally rejected by the **US -** a somewhat subjective stance to take. The **South Americans** voiced their concerns mainly on abortion issues, health care and on domestic violence - a major problem - particularly in Mexico. A strong influence in this region is that it is predominantly Roman Catholic, which brings the focus on the **major religious groups**, i.e. the Christian and the (representatives of the) Muslim groups. For the former, issues such as abortion, contraception and family planning arose. The latter, represented by mainly male delegates, debated on behalf of their women, always emphasizing that women's rights and the advancement thereof, is acceptable, as long as it does not clash with 'Arabness' (where applicable) and Islam. 'Arabness' (in the context of the advancement of women's rights) pertains to 'how' Islam assigns 'what' role to women in Arab society. 'Arabness' also pertains to the question of achieving a lasting peace in the Middle East and to a basic respect in that region of the differences between various cultures and values. The suffering of Palestinian and Syrian women is very much linked to the Israeli occupation issue. The delegates from **Asia** spoke mainly on the issue of trafficking in women, as it is a problem for their region. The **Caribbean Islands group** stated that women in those regions were mostly

aware of the multiple roles of women. They were the only ones to emphasize the need to be environmentally aware and how this awareness affects the advancement of women's rights (Ibid.: 1-45).

7   THE DUTY OF THE STATE: CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTATION

A major challenge to the implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action** is what national plans or strategies (if any) have been drawn up by those countries who adopted it. Members states should have provided an overview of the national critical areas of concern, as well as selected activities as presented in their action plans. The document submitted to the UN should also indicate what institutional arrangements have been made and what national and international resources are to be allocated. Essentially, the duties of the state are the following: to adopt the **Beijing Platform for Action**; to develop national action plans; to provide institutional and other resources; and to follow-up on the progress made. As at 22 December 1997 the South African government has yet to submit its action plan. African states that have submitted their plans on the aforementioned date are:

Algeria	Guinea	Senegal
Angola	Kenya	Sudan
Botswana	Mali	Swaziland
Burkina Faso	Morocco	Tunisia
DRC	Mozambique	Uganda
Egypt	Niger	United Republic of Tanzania
Ghana	Nigeria	Zimbabwe

(Women Watch. Follow-up to Beijing: 1-2).

The questions arise: What does the **Beijing Platform for Action** mean to women in the rural areas, to women living in the cities or even to women working in the corporate world? Whose responsibility is it to ensure the proper implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action**? The fact is that in many countries a wide gulf remains between the articulation of global principles and their application. What action has taken place since Beijing? How

does this implementation action become the responsibility of the state? Major steps towards advancing women's rights have been taken by participating governments, the UN system and civil society. Legislation has been revised and brought in line with CEDAW, as well as with the demands of the **Beijing Platform for Action**. Basic access to justice, both at national and international level have improved. In the various governments justice now prevails in their courts, which reflects a commitment to gender equality and greater accessibility to all citizens. Policy-making processes and planning now truly reflect the realisation of the inclusion of women and are better equipped to deal with the complex modern-day social problems that particularly affect women, i.e. poverty and violence.

The twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, *Women 2000 – Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century* (Beijing +5) (held in New York in June 2000), had governments reaffirming their commitment to the goals and objectives contained in the **Beijing Platform for Action** adopted in 1995. The outcome document of the Beijing +5 contained a political declaration and, "Further actions and initiatives to implement the **Beijing Platform for Action**". Delegates agreed that, although there were a number of positive elements, certain barriers still remained. Governments had to display the necessary political will and allocate the required resources in order to achieve the goals of the multilateral treaty. It is not enough that participants 'display' a political will to deal with the issue. States need to be held accountable for either their action or lack thereof. National mechanisms need to collaborate and not compete with one another.

During the Beijing +5, delegates participated in the various special events and panel discussions, specifically to determine what gender equality means to a government and its policy-makers. Under discussion were the following: good practices in gender mainstreaming, training of women, micro-credit programmes, the protection of internally displaced women and girls, health issues, emergencies affecting women, a gender perspective as regards the various international activities and general gender awareness for governments. These particular areas would ensure that governments, having been delegated the task of ensuring the implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action**, understood

fully what was expected of them and what the possible obstacles to implementation were (Ibid.: 4).

Globalisation also offers challenges to the full implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action**. The latter can offer increased opportunities for some and further marginalize others. Developing countries had to face problems of the high cost of external debt servicing, which reduced the implementation abilities for some governments and aggravated the problem of the feminization of poverty. Governments and intergovernmental organizations should recognize the value of partnerships with NGO's and that such partnerships would increase the prospects of effectively implementing the **Beijing Platform for Action**. Likewise, all the stakeholders, including the UN system, the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organisation, parliaments and trade unions, need to support government efforts and possibly develop complementary programmes of their own, to further ensure the success of the initiatives. The effective participation of women at all levels and spheres of society on the basis of equality, is another absolute prerequisite to the successful implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action** (UN Document. Further Actions and Initiatives 2000: 18).

As a universal forum, the UN has made it possible for the various delegates from different countries, with their varying perspectives on the issue of the advancement of women's rights, to voice their point of view and to participate in a vital sharing of information, despite the difficulties encountered when negotiating in a multilateral context. As a point of interest, a discussion on the diversity of approaches and responses of the delegates attending this multilateral conference will follow.

8   THE SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In the case of South Africa, the road has been (and still is) a long and hard one. Most of the twelve critical areas of concern have been addressed by the variety of concerns raised. In South Africa's past, discrimination on the basis of colour basically set the tone for discrimination on the basis of sex. Efforts to improve legislative, judicial and executive

responses, particularly violence and discrimination against women, were met with limited success.   This pitiful situation was perpetuated by two factors, i.e. "a lack of political commitment to improve the position of women generally and a lack of clarity on the government's duties towards women who were subjected to violence" (Combrink 1998: 666).

A lack of sensitivity, judicially and otherwise, regarding the concept of gender reform also contributed to the state of affairs prevailing in South Africa at the time. With the change of government in 1994 and the South African Constitution of 1996 (particularly, with the adoption of section 12(1)(c), which states the right "to be free from all forms of violence, from public or private sources") heralded a new year for South African women (Ibid.: 667). South Africa's pledge at the Beijing +5 was that its assurance that it was totally committed to the **Beijing Platform for Action**.   The South African Constitution protected all the human rights of all South Africans, and the empowerment of women is seen as a constitutional priority (UN General Assembly Press Release. GA/9725 2000: 34).

What is the obligation of the state, particularly when faced with the old attitude, *viz*. that the state is not responsible for domestic violence against women, simply because the state did not commit it? The South African delegation to Beijing was led by the then Health Minister, Dr Nkosazana Zuma. The commitments agreed upon in the **Beijing Declaration** and the **Beijing Platform for Action** ensured that the issue regarding a state's obligation became a priority. Subsequent to Beijing, the South African government eventually ratified CEDAW. When a state ratifies an agreement or convention, matters change somewhat.   Under international law, a state's responsibility is directly connected to the extent of its international obligations. In terms of human rights, the nature of the state's duties is three-fold: a duty to *avoid* violating human rights; a duty to *protect* human rights from being violated; and a duty to *aid* those whose human rights have already been violated (Combrink 1998: 668). The **Beijing Platform for Action** specifically identifies the issue of violence against women (along with eleven other critical areas of concern) and it is thus a priority. As a formal political commitment the South African government endorsed all the twelve critical areas of concern.   Important role-players were assigned responsibilities by the

Beijing Platform for Action, for example the NGO's. The Beijing conference ensured that the responsibility of the state is to protect, investigate, punish and compensate for acts of violence against women, in both the public and private spheres (Ibid.: 681).

8.1   Women's rights in South Africa

Prior to the Beijing Conference in 1995, the Women's National Coalition in South Africa met to decide what they wished to include in the new constitution that was being drafted in 1994. The South African Constitution of 1995 is widely regarded as a progressive document, owing mainly to its emphasis on human rights. The advancement of women's rights in South Africa features very prominently therein. The **Beijing Platform for Action** complimented the South African Constitution by ensuring the practical methods of implementing women's full and equal participation in development, politics, decision-making and international cooperation to achieve world peace. Refer to Table 3 for the number of women MPs appointed to Parliament and Provincial Parliaments in 1999.

The Department of Justice in South Africa has made progress in developing a gender policy as part of the broader transformation of the entire justice system. The legal system must represent and serve the needs of all South Africans. The NGO's, such as the ANC Women's League, the Women's Health Project and the Women's National Coalition, in providing services to women, were the first institutions to identify problems within the South African judicial system. Women had been invisible in the South African legal system. The problem areas that were identified were the laws dealing with domestic violence, rape, maintenance and inheritance (UNIFEM. Bringing Equality Home. Government Policy n.d.: 1-2).

Despite these developments, discrimination against women still persists at all levels. The successful implementation of the Beijing document depends very much on the availability of resources, political will, accountability and the mechanisms for including women in the decision-making processes.

8.2 South Africa and the Beijing Platform for Action

The South African government committed itself to the adoption of the entire **Beijing Platform for Action**. By committing itself, the government has certain obligations to taking a leading role in the implementation process. A long-term goal for the South African government should be what is termed a 'critical mass' of female representation to be present in all decision-making bodies.   The national machinery that has been established as a result of the Beijing conference comprises four bodies, *viz.* the Parliament Women's Caucus, the Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and the Status of Women; the Office on the Status of Women (OSW) and the South African Commission on Gender Equality. If the South African government does not ensure that each of these four bodies of the national machinery do not have adequate support, resources and proper function coordination, the prospects for the successful advancement of women's rights in South Africa in the future will be bleak.

8.2.1   Parliamentary Women's Caucus in South Africa

The Parliamentary Women's Caucus in South Africa comprises all the women members of parliament. There are representatives from the ANC, as well as representatives from the other political parties, i.e. the multiparty caucus. The caucus reports to its respective party caucus, to its political organization and to parliament as a whole. Its main function is to oversee parliamentary proceedings. Other functions include: providing training for women parliamentarians, providing an advocacy role for women and networking for and on behalf of women in politics. The caucus examines various issues concerning women. In addition, by keeping up a regular flow of correspondence with the Ministers concerned, they keep a close watch on the laws passed in Parliament, thus ensuring that the laws are implemented properly. They also ensure that all government policies are gender-sensitive. The caucus oversees the setting of quotas of at least 30% of women in the various political parties, i.e. to have women represent them in Parliament (Xingwana interview: November 2000).

8.2.2 Commission on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and the Status of Women

The main function of the Commission on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and the Status of Women is to monitor and evaluate either the progress - or lack thereof - on the quality of life and improving the quality of the lives of women. The commission pays particular attention to the South African government's commitment to the **Beijing Platform for Action**, to the implementation of CEDAW and to any other international instrument applicable to the advancement of women's rights. This commission may make recommendations (but may not amend) concerning all bills passed in Parliament. The commission investigates the rural areas and monitors the implementation of, for example the Violence Against Women Act and the new Maintenance Act passed recently. They have very little general support and even fewer resources available to them to enable them to perform their function more efficiently (Pauw interview: December 2000).

8.2.3 Office of the Status of Women

The Office of the Status of Women (OSW) forms part of the government and reports directly to the President's office. The OSW is a coordinating unit that is part of the national machinery of South Africa. The OSW has set up the following programme areas, *viz*. policy development; gender mainstreaming; coordination; networking and liaison; capacity building; and advice to the premier. The OSW works with the gender focal points within the ministries specifically with regards to programme delivery and not administration. The OSW is responsible for reporting to external agencies (UN) on the international instruments that South Africa has aligned itself with, i.e. CEDAW, the **Beijing Platform for Action** and the Copenhagen agreements with regards to gender (Joint Monitoring Committee document April 2000).

8.2.4   Commission on Gender Equality

The Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) is an independent body that was created in terms of the constitution and democracy. One of its main functions is to monitor and audit the attendant activities for promoting gender equality. Another crucial function of the commission is that it has to enhance public awareness on gender issues. Parliamentary committees involve the CGE in the development of policy and legislation. The private sector also utilises the CGE to ensure the promotion of gender equality (Delport interview: September 2000).

Within these national machinery set-ups (also in South Africa), an interesting monitoring strategy, referred to as, 'shadow reporting' is implemented. Shadow reports are drafted by the NGO's.   In these reports the state of women's human rights are described. Comments are also provided on the reports of their own governments. The main focus of shadow reports is on what a government is **not** doing as regards the implementation of women's rights. In these reports NGO members raise pertinent questions and ensure that their issues are included on the national agenda. Governments have to respond to these 'accountability audits', as further international (UN) implications will result if they do not. The main purposes of this process involving the women's NGO's are the following: Governments are held accountable for the commitments made at the CEDAW committee sessions; dialogue is constantly encouraged on how to implement the CEDAW committees' concluding comments; and public awareness is raised in the countries themselves (UNIFEM Bring Equality Home. The CEDAW Reporting Process n.d.:2).

The implementation of the Beijing document would be effected at three levels, viz. at the international level, the UN (where the minimum international standards are set); at the regional level, The Organisation for African Unity, (where the Women's Protocol was attached to the African Charter on Human Rights); and at the local level, The Southern African Development Community (SADC) (where the relevant document is further enhanced). It is at this latter level that the **Beijing Platform for Action** should be significant to the women of South Africa (Delport interview: September 2000).

The unfortunate current situation in South African is that the established national machinery does not appear to be collaborating. A chaotic situation threatens to develop if these bodies do not make a concerted effort to work together.

Since 1975 a slow, but steady process was set in motion to advance women's rights. Amendments have been made to national constitutions, and governments are very much being held accountable to the process of advancing women's rights. Each UN conference held has built on the previous one. By way of international conferences, multilateral diplomacy has contributed to the addition and improvement of methods for bringing women into the mainstream.

9 MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY AS AN INSTRUMENT TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The issue of the advancement of women's rights has been accorded central importance on the global agenda. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, four major world conferences on women have served to unite the international community and to list common objectives. An effective plan of action for the advancement of all women was submitted subsequently. During the **first stage** (comprising the first three decades of the UN's existence) the work on behalf of women consisted of: **firstly**, the classification of women's legal and civil rights; and **secondly**, the gathering of information on the status of women around the world. It was then that it was realized that laws alone could not ensure the equal rights of women.

The **second stage** was characterized by the four world conferences convened by the UN to develop strategies and plans of action for the advancement of women. The status of women worldwide has undergone major shifts in focus. Initially women were acknowledged in terms of their developmental needs. Later, however, they were acknowledged in terms of the extent to which they should participate in the actual developmental process.

9.1 The contribution of multilateral diplomacy to the advancement of women's rights

Ideally, it would be unnecessary to establish an additional body within the UN to deal with all the multilateral diplomacy efforts to advance the status of women in all international relations. Women's rights would be accepted by all as human rights and would thus require no special mention. The various UN bodies adopted different approaches when they dealt with violence against women, for example the International Criminal Court, in recognising rape as a war crime. With the rise of ethnicity, a stronger awareness of culture, of religions, of fundamentalism and of the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the promotion of the awareness of the rights of women faced more obstacles. These obstacles emerged as a direct result of the changes in the political environment. How could a culture be turned upside down and revolutionalised? In linguistic circles, the "Whorf Hypothesis" proposes the following: Human thought is structured by the semantics and structures of the languages people speak. The more something is said, the more it will be believed to be true. Attitudes and ways of thinking can be inculcated to believe in a 'correct' and 'acceptable' way of thinking. Such is the power of political slogans, dogma and advertising. Changing words (thereby changing their political and social references) could cause such a cultural revolution. By developing a new women's language, women can be recognised as political beings. New semantics always imply major shifts in thinking. Changes of great proportions begin with the mere discussion of a topic. In time it becomes a loud roar, and all who hear it acknowledge the change. For example women's rights activists insisted on referring to rape a 'war crime'. What they did was to reclassify a private, shameful affair as a public responsibility. The nature of multilateral diplomacy has afforded the UN the potential to be an extraordinary agent of this social change (Yoon 2000: 1).

What follows is a personal assessment of how the process of multilateral diplomacy has advanced the status of women's rights, and what the actual developments have been in each case:

(i)   Mexico City (1975)

- The **World Plan of Action document** was adopted and is the first international document to address women's rights.

- A **global effort** to promote the advancement of women, which resulted in a worldwide dialogue on gender equality.

- A **process of learning** was set in motion. This process involved deliberation, negotiation, setting objectives, identifying obstacles and reviewing the progress made.

- In early 1970's **the perceptions of women** changed, i.e. from women being passive recipients of support, to being full and equal partners with men, with equal access to resources.

- The conference led to the establishment of **INSTRAW** and **UNIFEM**.

- An increase in the **number of women participating** in multilateral diplomacy.

- Three broad goals were identified: **equality, peace and development**. Feminist theory identified clashes of interests in terms of these goals, i.e. the women from the East were concerned with peace, the women from the West with equality and the Third World women with development.

(ii)   Copenhagen (1980)

- The Copenhagen (1980) conference was convened to **review and appraise** the 1975 World Plan of Action.

- The adoption of the world's first truly multilateral convention, **CEDAW**, considered as the bill of rights for women.

- The realisation that a shortcoming existed concerning the fact that women's rights were being recognised at an international conference, yet not in the domestic sphere, i.e. the **public** *versus* **the private domain.**

- **NGO's** began collaborating towards a common goal.

- Three areas of action were identified: equal access to **education, employment opportunities and health care** services. These were related to the three goals of Mexico City, *viz.* equality, peace and development.

(iii)   Nairobi (1985)

- The Nairobi conference was convened to mainly **review the progress** made during the decade for women that had just ended.

- This conference was deemed to have heralded the **birth of global feminism**. At Mexico City the women's movement had been divided by world politics and economic realities. Now it was a unified, international force under the banner of equality, development and peace.

- The **Forward-Looking Strategies document** that was adopted declared all issues to be women's issues.

- **NGO's were diverse** in nature and were increasing their attendance numbers. Other multilateral mechanisms, such as coalitions, alliances and networks also increased and had a profound effect on the advancement of women's rights..

- These developments at the conferences resulted in a realisation that women were able to **mobilise globally** and to do research on the lives of women - thereby facilitating changes for women.

- The main purpose of the conference was to bring women together, to unite them, to exchange information, to develop strategies and to further their goals, i.e. the **advancement of women's rights.** This was truly multilateral diplomacy at work.

- The conference forums reinforced the issue, by stating clearly that the advancement of women was **no longer an isolated issue,** but was connected to all spheres of society.

- The conferences also reinforced the realisation that women needed to be **involved in all stages of decision-making**. Men were still the ones making all the decisions and possibly contributing to the implementation process.

(iv) **Beijing (1995)**

- The 1995 Beijing Conference was a major conference. It instigated a total **re-evaluation of society**, moving the focus from women to gender. Women's issues were no longer considered to be 'add-ons', and women were accorded the right to be integrated fully into society.

- The adoption of the **Beijing Declaration** and the **Beijing Platform for Action** were agenda items aimed at empowering women in all spheres of life.

- NGO's became an **important driving force** to be reckoned with they directly influenced the content of the **Beijing Platform for Action**.

- **National mechanisms** were established globally, national leaders were now accountable for the implementation outcomes.

- A multilateral conference characteristic, namely the diversity of the participants, was proven at Beijing not to be a problem, but an advantage. **Diversity was considered to be a strength**, particularly in the context of the international women's movement.

- One of the outcomes of the Beijing conference was that the concept of women's rights was now recognized as **not being a solely Western concept**.

(v) **Beijing +5**

- At the Beijing + 5 the **Beijing Platform for Action was reaffirmed** as the blueprint for women's equality.

- **New and updated issues,** such as violence against women, empowerment, health, education, human rights, poverty, debt relief, globalisation, armed conflict and political participation were added to the agenda

The multilateral characteristics of a conference can also be interpreted negatively. The complaints received regarding the logistics of the conference and the NGO's' venue could have derailed the conference process by diverting the attentions of the delegates. Who is agrees to speak at a conference is also an indication of a particular government's

commitment to an issue. A multilateral conference of this magnitude is also an ideal opportunity to disseminate propaganda, to divert attention from women's issues on a mass scale. Diplomatic feuds, such as the strained relationship between the People's Republic of China and the United States of America, could be refueled at a conference and divert attention once again from the issues on hand. (Personal assessment of all readings.) Multilateral diplomacy has played a decisive and active role in placing the advancement of women's rights on the global agenda.

9.2 The contribution of NGO's to the advancement of women's rights

As NGO's were being utilised to provide and deliver aid to victims of war, they were confronted by the fact that the women involved in such situations bore the brunt of the atrocities. In war situations men leave the women behind to care for the elderly, other family members and to attend to the problems of daily life. However, the traditional role of men and women in the community had drastically altered. These same women may have become refugees, who were forced to move to a strange environment - albeit to a refugee camp - only to be subjected to violence, such as rape or food aid deprivation (the latter owing to the fact that certain cultures do not recognise families headed by women). It was now up to the witnesses of such atrocities to bring attention to them and (by means of multilateral diplomatic instruments) to place these issues firmly on the global agenda. Members of coalitions cooperate to have an individual or shared agenda and to augment their lobbying and bargaining power at an international conference. The 1995 Beijing Conference proved that, even though some participants did not really believe in the issues under discussion, they nevertheless attended. As one of the effective instruments of multilateral diplomacy, a conference of this magnitude, which enjoys such a degree of publicity (scrutiny) and the status of belonging to the 'power club', would never be dismissed as a waste of time (UN General Assembly Press Release GA/|SM211 2000).

Since 1985, when the UN Decade for Women ended, the number of participants at both the intergovernmental level and at NGO forum level has increased quite drastically. Lobbying in general, as well as on behalf of women, can take on a number of forms. 'Direct pressure-

group activity' such as the women's section of intergovernmental organizations, is one example. An intricate 'web' of transnational relationships, which characterise the interactions between women's groups, began emerging in the 1970s and 1980s from the Women in Development movement.

During the 1990's, the roles of women as participants in debates and as major players in the UN have become recognized to such an extent that the women's movement is now considered to be a legitimate actor as a result of its participation in the NGO forums (Steans 1998:162).

NGO's have made major contributions as role-players in the multilateral diplomatic process. The NGO women of the world are richly diverse, coming from all walks of life. They gathered at Beijing in 1995 and, together with the governments present, addressed women's issues and the barriers that prevent women from achieving equality, development and peace.

10 CONCLUSION

Both the UN and the NGO's have made dramatic contributions to advancing women's rights. As a universal forum, the UN makes it possible to exchange information and ideas despite the difficulty in negotiations. The nature of multilateral conferences, where governments collaborate with NGO's, ensures the successful and on-going implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action**. One of the strongest messages that came from Beijing was that diversity is seen as a strength and not as a weakness - particularly in the women's movement - in societies and across cultures. The notion of 'women's rights' being a Western concept was thus proven to be a misconception at the Beijing conference.

As an instrument of multilateral diplomacy, the world summit has done much to expand the breadth of women's rights, to define them more substantially and to prescribe specific guidelines to entrench such rights. It is only since 1975 that women's rights were actually included on the UN agenda. Since then, four world summits on women have been convened

and each has produced a set of documents that has supplemented those of the preceding conferences.

Gender mainstreaming sets a clear tone for the 'how' and 'what' of advancing women's rights. The UN and its multilateral conferences have become a voice for the women's movement. How multilateral diplomacy has functioned and contributed to the advancement of women's rights is clearly evident from the UN's international conference activities, particularly during the period 1975 – 2000. Progress has been steady, albeit slow, and the major challenge now is how to translate theory into practice, i.e. how do the decisions made at Beijing and New York affect the lives of millions of women all over the world? These conferences must mean something to women! Clearly defined, are the specific duties and the roles of governments. Having ratified agreements, they are now obligated to ensure their implementation. The diverse nature of delegates attending a conference of such magnitude, as well as the particular and diverse concerns that they voice, are directly related to the twelve critical areas of concern contained in the **Beijing Platform for Action**. The **Beijing Political Declaration** and the **Beijing Platform for Action** as outcome documents, must surely have some significance for the global cause of the advancement of women, otherwise it merely becomes another meaningless bit of paper.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION

In this study the primary aim is to examine the extent to which the UN's world summit, as an instrument of multilateral diplomacy has, since 1995, contributed to the advancement of women's rights globally. Preceding 1995, the UN (assisted by civil society and NGO's) was instrumental in putting women on the global agenda. This was a daunting task considering that the same international arena had excluded women both as victims and role-players in international relations. The question that was raised by Enloe (1989): ***Where are the women?*** prompted another question-*cum*-statement, *viz.*, ***Where should they be***. Women have never been excluded from international relations - only excluded from the debates.

As a diplomatic instrument multilateral diplomacy has its uses, its limitations and its successes as regards the advancement of women's rights. The effects of globalisation on the conduct of international relations should not be underestimated: they are complex and have created problems for both the UN and multilateral diplomacy. The nature of multilateral diplomacy renders it conducive to managing order and change very well. International conferences are focused on single issues and are open to public scrutiny. Sensitive issues, such as the advancement of women can (and have been) be prioritised on the global agenda and are subsequently incorporated into the policies of participating states.

One of the more serious limitations of a multilateral conference is that the states attending, may agree to the proposals made and yet, upon returning to their respective countries, could either misinterpret the proceedings or not comply with what was agreed to.

Whether multilateral conferences are permanent or *ad hoc*, certain procedural problems are encountered. Questions, such as the location of a venue, who will be attending, who drafts the agenda, what items to put on an agenda, the style of the proceeding and what decisions are taken, can all place severe restrictions on the potential success of a multilateral conference. Who will be attending or who will not be attending a multilateral conference

could constitute both a restriction and a success. The attendance of a key political figure, such as Bill Clinton, at the Beijing Conference would have been an indication of his country's stance on the issue of women's rights. Hilary Clinton's last-minute decision to attend was disappointed some and made a less than meaningful contribution to the proceedings. She did not attend in her personal capacity, but as the wife of the President of the United States of America.

The importance of the UN as an instrument of multilateral diplomacy in these modern times depends very much on its capacity to reform its structures. The UN must maintain its relevance to all structures and levels of international society in order to manage the complex global issues. Its partnership role with civil society must be acknowledged, and NGO's must assume their pivotal role on the global stage. Civil society has played a major role in mobilising interest in the advancement of women's rights. The UN has proven to be an efficient instrument for the NGO's purposes.

Women's rights are human rights; human rights are women's rights. The lack of status of women in international relations emphasized the need for gender mainstreaming into the UN structures. Although the four schools of feminist thought do not explicitly agree on a single approach to the problem of the status of women, they all contribute to building a body of knowledge and assist in developing a language to address women's rights in international relations. In summary, the feminist theorists provide a theoretical framework within which to approach the issue of advancing and recognising women's rights.

Other instruments relevant to this study on the advancement of global women's rights are the following. As an instrument of multilateral diplomacy, the UN provides a generally efficient forum with which to approach the issue. NGO's were the first to recognise the need to deal with women's rights as a global issue and therefore pursue this issue vigorously. States are characterised by the duality of their role in advancing women's rights. As global actors they attend the multilateral conferences and it befalls them to implement the decisions made. All these 'instruments' have to face a common, potential

obstacle, namely resources. A lack of resources (albeit human, financial or other) implies that the global issue of advancing women will never be resolved.

Three hypotheses were given in the introduction to this study:

The **first** hypothesis suggests **that multilateral diplomacy by virtue of its character has a constructive role to play in the advancement of women's rights**. The characteristics of multilateral diplomacy that lend themselves to the advancement of women's rights are numerous. The very nature of multilateral diplomacy, i.e. how a conference works, makes a global focus on global issues possible. Participants become mobilised and focus more easily on common goals than in bilateral situations. For example, should the US and another future key role-player in international relations hold a summit to discuss the global advancement of women's rights, such an effort would be in vain. Within multilateral diplomatic structures, the people are involved in solving global problems by employing a bottom-up approach, with civil society challenging the decisions of governments. The former (civil society) has the real interests of the people at heart.

Another characteristic that lends itself particularly well to the advancement of women's rights is the opening of debates to for public scrutiny, thereby holding participating governments accountable for decisions that they contributed to in making. Diplomacy itself is in an ever-changing state of flux. Historical events and economic factors make their mark on the status and evolution of the diplomatic action taken to meet current global challenges. This hypothesis has been confirmed.

The **second** hypothesis suggests **that women and men are affected by global issues in different ways**. History has been written from a male perspective; global issues have been scrutinised from a one-sided approach. Questions regarding the whereabouts of women in international relations abound. Feminist theories tackled the issue of how women were (not) being included in international politics, thereby offered a theoretical perspective for the problems of women's rights. Since the end of the Cold War the prevalence of uncertainties on the global stage reached a high point. The hiatus, referred to previously, not only

contributed to these international uncertainties, but also forced the issue of a need to solve global problems from another perspective. Governments could not be expected to solve these problems on their own. Civil society and especially NGO's began to take their rightful place, i.e. by involving the people to solve the problems of the people. The NGO's' presence on the battlefields as they delivered food-aid on behalf of the UN made them come to the startling realisation that women and children were the main targets of hostile attacks by warring states and rebel groups. Even within their own societies, women were the targets of culturally justified violations, such as the food deprivation of a female-headed family. The realisation was, therefore that, as refugees or victims of war, women and men were not affected in the same manner. This hypothesis has also been confirmed.

The **third** hypothesis that required scrutiny is that, **although the UN has become the voice for the international women's movement, civil society (*viz*. the NGO's) makes a vital contribution to the advancement of women's rights**. Yes, the UN *has* mobilised the global community towards the advancement of women's rights. However, what it has not been too successful in achieving is gaining the total *acceptance* of and the total *ratification* of the bill of rights for women (CEDAW) by its member states. These facts do not allow the vital role played by the UN structures to be disputed, but they do reflect a top-down approach to solving global problems. The real (factual) danger was that the UN did not fully comprehend the real status of women concerning the global issues.

The consistent role of the NGO's has been indispensable, constructive and creative in approaching and understanding global issues. The approach of NGO involvement represents the bottom-up approach to solving global problems. Both the bottom-up and top-down approaches run the risk of reaching a dead-end in the process, i.e. policy never is translated into action. However, the role of the NGO's in advancing women's rights by mobilising people should not be underestimated, particularly if the UN presses ahead with its muted reforms of its structures. NGO's will assume their rightful position on the global stage as global actors. This hypothesis has also been confirmed.

The three main *foci* of this entire study, i.e. multilateral diplomacy, women's rights and the advancement of women's rights by means of the UN, are dealt with in the aforementioned hypotheses. From a diplomatic perspective, the second, third and fourth chapters contribute (in terms of women's rights) to the vast amount of literature on the subject of women's rights.

In Chapter Two the possibilities that multilateral diplomacy and its characteristics offered the advancement of women's rights issue were explored. The historical overview provided an assumption for the focus of the chapter, namely that diplomacy is forever evolving its *modus operandi*. By mainstreaming a gender perspective into the structures of a multilateral diplomatic instrument such as the UN, the advancement of women's rights could be successfully effected. Mainstreaming should not be considered a threat to diplomatic structures, but as another aspect of the evolution of the diplomacy process.

Shifting the UN's diplomatic focus from a security to a humanitarian one in the post-Cold War era was conducive to promoting and advancing the rights of women globally. An examination of the new role-players on the global stage underscores the need to nurture a partnership between the UN and the NGO's. Neither can claim relevancy in the global context without the other.

Chapter Three concerns the 'what' of this study, i.e. that women's rights are human rights. In this chapter it is evident that it took the UN from 1945 to 1993 and the drafting of the bill of rights for women (CEDAW) to realise and acknowledge that women's rights were not being fully regarded as human rights. The feminists posed the questions on the true position of women in international relations. The world came to the realisation that global issues were, in fact, gendered. At this stage it became very obvious that a one-sided, male approach was being taken to solve global issues. Barriers needed to be overcome, such as women's equal participation in leadership roles being plagued by the persistence of stereotypes towards women, perpetual discrimination and entrenched prejudices. In certain cases even a women's own culture, became a barrier to the advancement of her rights. The focus on diverse cultures and the Western notion of human rights are linked to the Beijing

Conference. The scope and size of the conference meant that the diversity of cultures present was vast. At the close of the conference this diversity was deemed to be a strength and proved that divergent cultures in themselves should not pose a threat to the advancement of women's rights.

In Chapter Four recognition was given from the outset to the positive and constructive role the UN has played thusfar in galvanising the women's movement. A long and slow process, spanning the period 1975 – 2000, has seen conferences held, instruments created, conventions drawn up and follow-up special sessions held to monitor the progress of advancing women's rights. The acceptance of the need to reform and the presence of new role players on the global stage are crucial to the continued positive status of the advancement of women's rights.

Through its conferences and instruments that it has introduced multilateral diplomacy continues to create public awareness concerning the issue of women's rights. Multilateral diplomacy, together with the NGO's, should clearly define their respective roles and continue to work in partnership with one another.

The practicalities of implementing the outcome documents and decisions made at these major conferences will require particular attention in the future. In the South African context a number of high-ranking delegates attended the Beijing Conference in 1995. Upon their return they proceeded to set up a national mechanism. South Africa eventually ratified CEDAW in 1995: another positive outcome of South Africa's involvement in the Beijing Conference. An understanding of the exact nature of the practicalities of the implementation process will reveal the difficulties involved. This national machinery, headed by the Office of the Status of Women in South Africa and monitored by the South African Commission on Gender Equality, is faced with a great responsibility. The bodies that constitute the national machinery ensure that women take their rightful place in decision-making bodies and in the corridors of power. The road from Beijing is clear and straight. The road to be travelled is from the conference table, *via* the national mechanisms, to the policy and law makers, and,

ultimately, significantly affecting the lives of the women of South Africa, both in the domestic and public spheres. This is a non-negotiable fact.

Multilateral diplomacy has made major contributions to the advancement of women's rights. The characteristics of multilateral diplomacy ensure that other important global issues on the UN's agenda do not cloud the issue in question. Through the UN's structures, specialized agencies and established instruments, an effective mechanism to achieve this goal has been slowly, yet steadily constructed. The language that has been developed to alter the decision-makers' approach to global issues has virtually eradicated the earlier attitudes of complacency ("well that's just the way things are"). Rape, albeit in armed conflict or within a marriage, constitutes a crime against all humanity and has been brought out into the open. The silence of women has been broken. In no way should it be assumed or taken for granted that the problems surrounding the advancement of global women's rights are over. The playing fields have been levelled, the struggle has been given a name and the fight against all odds has begun.

The reform of the UN is non-negotiable - particularly in response to the restructuring of the global arena in the post-Cold War period. The successful advancement of women's rights depends on this reform. The UN system must set a good example of what gender mainstreaming entails, otherwise the same decision-makers will continue to make the decisions and global issues will continue to be examined from a one-sided (male) perspective. In its partnership with civil society the UN needs to be granted powers for a wider range of issues. The UN needs to be able to act beyond its current realms. This may be an idealistic approach and almost impossible suggestion in relation to the reform proposed. The Secretary-General should intensify his involvement in promoting the advancement of women's rights.

In the case of South Africa and the national mechanisms set up by its government, a single concept applies, *viz.* accountability. Some responsible individual should be held accountable for the slowness in responding to the adoption of the **Beijing Platform for Action**. We have one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, yet we struggle to

take action. Suspicions between each of the parts of the national machinery aggravate the problem and provide a brilliant case in point of how women are actually unable to work together towards a common goal. Once the working towards a common goal has been achieved, multilateral diplomacy, as an instrument for advancing women's rights, would then have been successful. By taking the outcome of a successfully dealt with issue, however complex, from the conference table right down to the women in rural Kwa-Zulu Natal and let it make a difference in their lives would indicate a great measure of success. The increased international attention (through the multilateral diplomatic channels) on women's issues over the past twenty years is encouraging. However, only the naïve would assume that the work is done. The outcomes of the Beijing Conference have clearly illustrated that women have a long way to go in achieving substantive and meaningful equality. Without peace, equality and development for all (the themes of the Nairobi Conference), none of the objectives of the Beijing Conference or of any other multilateral instrument will ever be achieved. The hope of changing the social patterns that keep women out of the international arena and keep their social status inferior to that of men, lies in the hands of our children.

TABLE 1

THE SPECIALISED AGENCIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

ORGANISATION	ABBREV	MAIN FUNCTION
International Labour Organization	ILO	Formulates policies and programmes to improve working conditions and employment opportunities and sets labour standards used by countries around the world.
Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN	FAO	Works to improve agricultural productivity and food security and to better the living standards of rural populations.
UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	UNESCO	Promotes education for all, cultural development, protection of the world's natural and cultural heritage, international cooperation in science, press freedom and communication.
World Health Organization	WHO	Coordinates programmes aimed at solving health problems and the attainment by all people of the highest possible level of health. It works in areas, such as immunization, health education and the provision of essential drugs.
International Monetary Fund	IMF	Facilitates international monetary cooperation and financial stability and provides a permanent forum for consultation, assistance and advice on financial issues.
International Civil Aviation Organization	ICAO	Sets international standards for the safety, security and efficiency of air transport and serves as the coordinator for international cooperation in all areas of civil aviation.
Universal Postal Union	UPU	Establishes international regulations for postal services, provides technical assistance and promotes cooperation in postal matters.
International Telecommunication Union	ITU	Fosters international cooperation to improve telecommunications of all kinds, coordinates the usage of radio and TV frequencies, promotes safety measures and conducts research.
World Meteorological Organization	WMO	Promotes scientific research on the Earth's atmosphere and on climate change and facilitates the global exchange of meteorological data.
International Maritime Organization	IMO	Works to improve international shipping procedures, raise standards in marine safety and to reduce marine pollution by ships.
World Intellectual Property Organization	WIPO	Promotes the international protection of intellectual property and fosters cooperation on copyright, trademarks, industrial designs and patents.
International Fund for Agricultural Development	IFAD	Mobilises financial resources to raise food production and nutrition levels among the poor in developing countries.
UN Industrial Development Organization	UNIDO	Promotes the industrial advancement of developing countries through technical assistance, advisory services and training.
International Atomic Energy Agency	IAEA	An autonomous intergovernmental organization under the aegis of the UN, works for the safe and peaceful utilisation of atomic energy.

(Official Classification of UN System 2000).

TABLE 2
LIST OF UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL ISSUES FOR 2000

Africa	Elections	International Law
Ageing	Energy	Law of the Sea and Antarctica
Agriculture	Environment	Least Developed Countries
Atomic Energy	Family	Question of Palestine
Children	Food	Peace and Security
Climate Change	Governance	Population
Culture	Habitat	Refugees
Decolonization	Health	Social Development
Demining	Human Rights	Space Technology
Development Cooperation	Humanitarian Affairs	Statistics
Persons with Disabilities	Indigenous People	Sustainable Development
Disarmament	Intellectual Property	Trade and Development
Drug Control and Crime Prevention	International Finance	Volunteerism
Education	Labour	Women
		Youth

TABLE 3

WOMEN MPs IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PARLIAMENT (BY PARTY): 1999

Party	Seats	Women	% of total
ANC	266	96	36.0
DP	38	7	15.8
IFP	34	7	20.6
NNP	28	3	10.7
UDM	14	2	14.3
ACDP	6	2	33.3
FF	3	0	0
UCDP	3	0	0
PAC	3	1	33.3
FA	2	0	0
Others	3	0	0

Note: The percentages become totally meaningless for parties that have very few seats in parliament. Those parties with just one seat are not individually mentioned, viz. the Minority Front, AEB and AZAPO. Source: Electoral Institute of SA.

TABLE 4

WOMEN IN PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA: 1999

Province	Total No. Seats	Women MPs	% Women
Eastern Cape	47	9	19%
Free State	30	7	23%
Gauteng	73	24	33%
KwaZulu-Natal	80	24	30%
Mpumalanga	28	6	21%
Northern Cape	30	8	27%
Northern Province	49	16	33%
North West	33	10	30%
Western Cape	42	9	21%

(The Politics of Empowerment. Women in Parliament. 1999).

LIST OF SOURCES

Barston, R.P. 1997. **Modern diplomacy**. London and New York: Longman

Baylis, J. & Smith, S. (eds). 1997. **The globalization of world politics: an introduction to international relations**. New York: Oxford University Press.

Berridge, G.R. 1995. **Diplomacy**. Theory and practice. London: Prentice Hall, Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Boisard, M.A. & Chossudovsky, E.M. (eds.) 1998. **Multilateral diplomacy/La Diplomatie Multilaterale**. The United Nations system at Geneva/Le Systeme Des Nations Unies a Geneve. A working guide/Guide a Travail. The Hague, London, Boston: Kluwer Law International

Burchill, S. & Linklater, A. 1996. **Theories of international relations**. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Chen, M.A. 1995. Engendering world conferences: the international women's movement and the United Nations. **Third World Quarterly.** (16) No. 3.

Combrink, H. Positive state duties to protect women from violence: recent South African developments. **Human Rights Quarterly.** Vol. 20. 1998.

Doyle, M.W. & Ikenberry, G.J. (eds.) 1997. **New thinking in international relations theory**. Oxford: Westview Press.

Ehlstain, J.B. 1981. **Public man, private women: women in social and political thought.** Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Enloe, C. 1989. **Bananas, beaches and bases**. Making feminist sense of international politics. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Faludi, S. 1992. **Backlash**. The undeclared war against women. Great Britian: Cox & Wyman Ltd.

Flax, J. 1992**.** Beyond equality: gender, justice and difference, in **Beyond equality and difference.** Citizenship, feminist politics and female subjectivity edited by Bock, G. and James, S. London, New York: Routledge.

Gallagher, A. 1997. Ending the marginalization: strategies for incorporating women in the United Nations human rights system. **Human Rights Quartely**. (19): 283-333.

Groom, A.J.R. & Taylor, P. 1990. **Frameworks for international cooperation.** London: Pinter Publishers.

Human rights are women's rights. **Amnesty International** 1995. London: Amnesty International Publications.

Joint Monitoring Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and Status of Women. **Transcription of Proceedings**. Workshop on International Law and Gender Analysis. 3 April 2000.

Kaufmann, J. 1996. **Conference diplomacy**. An introductory analysis. Third revised Edition. London. Macmillan Press Ltd.

Leigh-Phippard, H. 1996. Coalitions and contact groups in multilateral diplomacy. **Diplomatic Studies Programme No. 21.** Centre for the study of diplomacy. Leicester University.

Light, M & Halliday, F. 1994. Gender and international relations. **Contemporary international relations : A guide to theory**. Pinter Publishers Ltd: London.

Luard, E. 1994. **The United Nations**. How it works and what it does. Second edition. New York: St. Martins Press.

Mansbach, R.W. 1997. **The global puzzle: issues and actors in world politics**. 2nd Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Muldoon, J.P. Jr. 1998. Multilateral diplomacy and the post-Cold War United Nations. **Diplomatic Studies Programme No. 47**. Centre for the study of diplomacy. Leicester University.

Penna, D.R. & Campbell, P.J. 1998. Human rights and culture: beyond universality and relativism. **Third World Quarterly**. 19 (1): 7-27.

Peterson, V.S. & Runyan, A.S. 1993. **Global gender issues**. Oxford: Westview Press.

Pettman, J.J. 1996. **Worlding women**. A feminist international politics. London and New York: Routledge.

Riddel-Dixon, E. 1999. Mainstreaming women's rights: problems and prospects within the centre for human rights. **Global governance**. (5): 149-171.

Roberts, A. & Kingsbury, B. (eds.) 1994. **United Nations, divided world**. The UN's role in international relations. Second Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Ruggie, J.G. (ed.) 1993. **Multilateralism matters**. The theory and praxis of an institutional form. New York: Colombia University Press

Scruton, R. 1983. **A dictionary of political thought.** Macmillan Press: London.

South African Commission on Gender Equality. **Annual Report 2000**.

Spiro, P.J. 1995. New global communities: non-governmental organizations in international decision-making institutions. **The Washington Quarterly**. Winter: 45-55.

Steans, J. 1998. **Gender and international relations**. An introduction. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Stern, F. 1998. A century of building blocks for the new Europe. **International Herald Tribune.** 8 July 1998, page 9.

Sullivan, B & Whitehouse, G. 1996. **Gender, politics and citizenship in the 1999s**. University of New South Wales Press: Sydney

Sylvester, C. 1995. **Feminist theory and international relations in a post-modern era**. Cambridge: University Press.

The politics of empowerment. Women in Parliament. **Political Monitor**. Indicator SA. 1999. Vol. 16 No. 3. p. 29.

Ticker, J.A. **Gender in international relations**. Feminist perspectives on achieving global security. New York: Columbia University Press.

Turpin, J. & Lorentzen, L.A. (eds.) 1996. **The gendered new world order**. Militarism, development, and the environment. New York and London: Routledge.

UN Document. Women 2000. **Women in the UN 2000**. UN Department of Public Information.

UN Document. Women 2000. **The Four Global Women's Conferences 1975-1995: Historical Perspective 2000**. UN Department of Public Information.

UN Document. Twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century. **Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action**: 10 June 2000

UN Document. United Nations Development Programme. **Poverty Report 2000.** Overcoming human poverty. Denmark: PhØnix-Trykkeriet A/S.

UN Document**. Women in the United Nations.**   May 2000. United Nations Department of Public Information.

Weiss, T.G., Forsythe, D.P. & Coate, R.A. 1994. **The United Nations and changing world politics**. Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press.

Williams, R.E. 1997. The impact of feminist thought on human rights. **Global Society**. Volume 11 (1): 111-128.

Wong, N. 1991. Socialist feminism: our bridge to freedom, in **Third World Women and the politics of feminism**, edited by C. Mohanty, A. Russo and L. Torres. Indiana University Press: Bloomington.

INTERNET SOURCES

Alyanak, L. Estonian women face more inequality since breaking up of Soviet Union. Earth Times New Service. **Internet: http://earthtimes.org/nov/genderissuesestonianwomennov14_99.htm.** Access: 19 May 2000.

An international bill of rights for women. Tell your senator to support CEDAW. **Internet: http://www.msmagazine.com/campaign/cedaw2.html** Access: 7 November 2000.

Ayton-Shenker, D. UN Background Notes.   The challenge of human rights and cultural diversity. 1995. **Internet: http://www.un.org/rights/dpil627e.htm** Access: 22 March 2000.

Bunch, C. & Yoon, S. Women's groups begin the new millennium stronger than ever. Earth Times News Service. **Internet: http://www.earthtimes.org/jan/genderissueswomensgroupsjan21_99.htm**. Access: 19 May 2000.

Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. **Internet: http://un.org/Conferences/Women/PubInfo/Status/Scrn3.htm.** Access: 14 September 2000.

Gender mainstreaming Report. Conceptual framework, methodology and presentation of good practices. Final report of activities of the Group of Specialists on mainstreaming (EG-S-MS(98) 2). Strasbourg, May 1998 **Internet: http://www.dhdirhr.coefr/equality/Eng/Final%20report%20Mainstreaming.html**. Access: 15 June 2000.

Longworth, R.C. 1999. Activist groups gain influence in global body. Global Policy Forum. **Internet: http://www.globalpolicy.org/NGO's/issues/NGO'saa.htm.** Access: 13 June 2000.

Millennium Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. We the Peoples Executive Summary n.d. **Internet: http://www.un.org/millennium/sg/report/summ.htm.** Access 20 October 2000.

NGO's and the United Nations. Global Policy Forum. **Internet: http://www.globalpolicy.org/NGO's/docs99/gpfrep.htm.** Access 11 August 1999.

Official classification of United Nations system. **Internet: http://www.unsystem.org/index2.html.**   Access: 14 September 2000.

Policy for Transformation. South African Commission on Gender Equality. Glossary of terms n.d. **Internet: http://www.cge.org.za/publications/glossary.html.** Access: 14 March 2000.

Publications. Universal Declaration of Human Rights 50th Anniversary (Refugees Magazine, Issue 111). A woman's lot. **Internet: http://www.unhcr.ch/pubs/rm111/rm11108.htm.** Access: 7 October 1999.

Shiva, V. Third World Network.   Beijing Conference: gender justice and global apartheid n.d. **Internet: http://www.twnside.orgsg/title/just-cn.htm.** Access: 15 June 2000.

The UN in brief 2000. **Internet: http://www.un.org/overview/brief.html.** Access: 7 July 2000.

UN Actions for Women. **Internet: http://www.un.org/Conferences/Women/PubInfo/Status/Scrn2.htm.** Access: 14 September 2000.

UN Department of Public Information – NGO section. Funding and donor relations. 1999 Global Appeal. Refugee Women**. Internet: http://www.un.org/partners/civil_society/NGO's-dpi.htm**. Access: 7 July 2000.

UN Development Programme. Gender Good Practices: Interagency guidelines and criteria.
Gender in development January 2000. **Internet:**
http://www.undp.org/gender/practices/guidelines.html. Access: 22 May 2000.

UN Funding and Donor Relations. 1999 Global Appeal. Refugee Women. **Internet**:
http://www.unhcr.ch/fdrs/ga99/women.htm. Access: 7 October 1999.

UN General Assembly Press Release GA/SM/211. General Assembly calls for new relationship
between UN and civil society. **Internet: http:// www.un.org/fastweb.** Access: 6 November
2000.

UN General Assembly Press Release SG/SM/5813. NGO/262. Non-governmental organizations
must lead mobilization, debate, implementation. Secretary-Generals address to NGO conference.
Internet: http//www.un.org+un+un+pr1995+pr1995++FRAGMENTAT. Access: 11 May
1999.

UN General Assembly Press Release GA/9725. 10 June 2000 **Internet:**
http://www.un.org/news/press/docs/2000/20000610.ga9725.doc.html. Access: 13 June 2000.

UN General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session. Introduction statement by Ms Angela E.V. King
Assistant Secretary-General. October 2000. **Internet:**
http://un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/aevk55ga.html. Access 20 October 2000.

UN Press Release WOM/1194. 17 March 2000. **Internet: http://www.un.org/fastweb**. Access:
24 November 2000

UNIFEM. Bringing equality home. Implementing CEDAW. 1. Constitutions. **Internet:**
http://www.unifem.undp.org/cedaw/cedaw5.htm. Access: 3 November 2000.

UNIFEM. Bringing equality home. IV. Government Policy **Internet:**
http://www.unifem.undp.org/cedaw/cedawwen8.html Access: 3 November 2000.

UNIFEM. Bringing equality home. V. The CEDAW reporting process. **Internet:**
http://www.unifem.undp.org/cedaw/cedawen9.htm Access: 3 November 2000.

UNIFEM. Bringing equality home. VI. Reservations. **Internet:**
http://www.unifem.undp.org/cedaw/cedawe10.htm. Access: 3 November 2000.

UNIFEM Press Release. Launching of 1998 global campaign for women's human rights. 25
November 1997. **Internet: http://www.unifem.undp.org/pr_gc98.html.** Access: 9 May 2000.

Women Watch. Follow-up to Beijing. Summary of national action plans and strategies for
implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action**. **Internet:**
http://www.un.org/womenwatch/followup/national/africsum.htm. Access: 17 October 2000.

Women Watch. Frequently asked questions. n.d. **Internet:**
http://www.un.org/womenwatch/followup/beijing5/faq.htm. Access: 17 October 2000.

Women Watch. Preliminary analysis of the Beijing +5 Outcome document. June 2000. **Internet:**
http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/analysis.html. Access: 17 October 2000.

Women Watch. The UN Working for Women a. **Internet:**
http://www.un.org./womenwatch/un/unagency.htm Access: 17 October 2000.

Women Watch. The UN Working for Women b. **Internet:**
http://www.un.org/womenwatch/un/iinstrum.htm. Access: 17 October 2000.

Yoon, S. A quiet revolution through language pervading halls of UN. Earth Times News Service.
Internet: http://www.earthtimes.org/mar/genderissuesaquietrevolutionmar13_00.htm.
Access: 19 May 2000.

INTERVIEWS

Delport, E. Commissioner, Commission for Gender Equality: 20 September 2000.

Pauw, S. Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and the Status of Women: 7 December 2000 (telephone interview).

Roche, M. United Nations Officer: 15 August 2000.

Xingwana, L. Parliamentary Women's Caucus: November 2000 (telephone interview).

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the possibility of multilateral diplomacy, as an instrument, to advance women's rights in the realm of international relations. Multilateral diplomacy has proven to be an effective instrument for managing order and change in the international arena quite effectively. The United Nations, as an international organisation, provides a style of diplomatic interaction that is available for public scrutiny. Sensitive issues, such as the advancement of the status of women, have been prioritised on the global agenda and could be subsequently incorporated into the policies of participating states. The diversity of role players attending an international conference is another positive feature of multilateral diplomacy. By virtue of it's nature, multilateral diplomacy is therefore an effective instrument for focussing globally on the issue of women's rights.

The position of women in international political theory is dealt with by theorists from various perspectives. The feminist theorists ensure that social and political debates on the authority, legitimacy, democracy and universal human rights are considered from a woman's perspective. Where women are and where they should be are two questions that are equally important and crucial to dealing with the advancement of women's rights on the global agenda. Global issues, such as war, have had a shift in perspective from security-awareness to humanitarian-awareness. In its partnership with civil society, the United Nations as a diplomatic instrument, has become a voice for women internationally.

The patriarchic system of apartheid in South Africa managed to entrench discrimination within its legislation based on both race and gender. A particular focus is the national machinery set up within South Africa to ensure that what was agreed on to at the international conferences makes a difference to the lives of women in South Africa.

This paper intends to build on the existing body of knowledge currently available on the status of women in international relations theory. From a diplomatic perspective, it examines how the instrument of multilateral diplomacy has contributed to the advancement of women's rights.