



THE 1997

PEOPLE'S

SUMMIT

on APEC

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WOMEN'S

CONFERENCE

AGAINST

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WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

The 2nd International Women's Conference Against APEC opened today with 500 delegates packing the BC Room of the Plaza of Nations to hear a host of speakers from across the Asia-Pacific.

The delegates, about 100 of whom come from outside Canada, began the day with an opening prayer and welcome from Harriet Nahanee, followed by a welcome from Joan Grant Cummings of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC Canada), organizers of the women's conference.

A message of solidarity was then heard by the delegates, via videotape, from Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of an oppositional party to the military dictatorship in Burma. Kyi reaffirmed one of the most basic understandings of the audience, almost all of whom were women: that you cannot divorce the internal affairs of a country from its economic affairs. "There cannot be real economic progress without democracy," said Kyi, speaking of the situation in Burma, which includes her own house arrest, but touching on something noted throughout the day as being relevant for women in all countries.

Jeanette Armstrong, an artist, activist and teacher from the Okanagan Nation (north of Vancouver), was the day's keynote speaker. Armstrong's address touched on a number of issues, beginning with an understanding of communicating beyond the intellectual to the spiritual level. Armstrong set out how the New World Order has created the conditions where the people at the bottom are Indigenous People, particularly women. Armstrong's address also touched on specific areas, such as poverty, labour and the environment.

The Women's Conference opening plenary was organized into four main themes: the subject of women and labour was introduced by Alicia Sepulveda of the

Telecommunications Workers Union in Mexico, human rights was the focus of a speech by Yayori Matsui, Director of the Asia-Japan Women's Resource Centre, and the environmental impacts of APEC and other trade agendas was outlined by Sarojeni Rengam of the Pesticide Action Network in Malaysia.

In the fourth theme, economic and social development, Sunera Thobani made the point that the women's forum is the only People's Summit event that has taken a clear position in opposition to APEC. Thobani said engaging in the process or creating side agreements will not effectively counter APEC's devastating impact. "We really have to think about what this can accomplish."

As past-president of NAC-Canada, Thobani has heard from women all over the world that things are getting worse. "These are not accidental outcomes," said Thobani, explaining that the APEC agenda itself is based on the oppression of women. "Are we calling for an inclusion in the globalization agenda," Thobani asked the assembled delegates, "or are we calling for a transformation?"

"Until the last woman is free from the shackles of poverty and oppression... none of us can be free."

— Sunera Thobani

Thobani also called on delegates to beware the intensification of divisions between North and South. "Until the last woman is free from the shackles of poverty and oppression... none of us can be free," said Thobani to resounding applause from the audience. Thobani also cautioned against the North solely looking south for instances of human rights abuses. In Canada, First Nations women, single mothers, the homeless, domestic workers, migrant workers "will tell you about human rights violations," said Thobani, who noted the protests against Indonesia and China's leaders, but said she was "astounded" no one has targeted Bill Clinton or Jean Chretien.