

# Women in Radio in North America

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In 1986, WINGS, based in San Francisco, had just produced our second international women's radio program, and we received a small scholarship from the National Federation of Community Broadcasters to attend AMARC 2 in Vancouver. It was exhilarating to meet radio women from so many different countries, and those relationships would have a lot to do with our longevity – now, 27 years and counting.

In addition to attending women's events, we raised women's issues in the plenaries. During one panel I asked a question from the audience, about what women's programming was on the panelists' stations. The moderator, a man from Argentina, didn't like the question and refused to translate it for the panelists, so I asked in Spanish. After some silence, Joseph, from Haiti, answered the question, and then the others also answered.

For many years, women's issues continued to be controversial in AMARC, but still progress was made.

I recently asked Margaretta D'Arcy from Radio Pirate Woman about the beginnings of the Women's International Network at the Dublin conference in 1990. She claims Katherine Davenport from WINGS was the main instigator proposing an autonomous women's section inside AMARC, and that there was a lot of resistance, but supporters included "Lisa from CKUT Radio Montreal, the representative from Contraband FM, and also Donna Hoffman from Austin, Texas, who was then working at a station in Dublin." Among Margaretta's wishes for the new network is that it would provide a means for program-sharing among women, which has come true seasonally, around International Women's Day and the 16 Days Against Violence Against Women.

Ana Leah de Leon was also in Dublin, representing Women's Media Circle in the Philippines. She says she brought up the issue of full memberships for groups that produced community radio programming but did not own an actual broadcast station. In Philippines, community radio was not allowed. She says Katherine from WINGS opposed this resolution, but fortunately for both Women's Media Circle and WINGS, it passed.,

In other cases, too, ideas generated in women's caucus affected AMARC as a whole. For example, in Milan, I encouraged the women's network to push for a woman President of the organization. Maria Victoria Polanco from Colombia had been our Vice President for Women, and we nominated her for President. With the backing of the Latin American caucus, she won.

In Milan, I was designated as Women's International Network rep for North America. While I was there, I heard Sean O'Siochru talking about the upcoming inaugural meeting of what would become the International Telecommunications Union's Task Force for Gender Issues. Sean had also talked about AMARC's attempts to get the ITU to recognize the non-governmental sector. On leaving Milan, I went to Geneva and registered for the ITU gender meeting – raised a fuss because the form had check boxes only for government and private sector. That bore fruit and NGOs did become recognized, and indeed

prominently involved in the Gender Task Force. I, and later Lettie Longwe, who succeeded me as AMARC WIN representative on the task force, did a lot to raise awareness of community radio there.

Another place WIN pressed community radio's case was the Beijing+5 conference in New York in 2000. At the UN 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, women succeeded in getting a media plank in the Beijing Platform for Action, even though the two major national players, China and the US, both it - China believed that government should control the media, and the US - especially under

Bill Clinton - believed freedom of the press belongs to those who own the press.

At Beijing +5 we lobbied the US delegation to acknowledge the media plank, and lobbied the media caucus to add the word "broadcasting" to their statement. Some of the women said the term ICT – Information Communication Technology – included broadcasting, but Maria Suarez from Radio Feminista Internacional in Costa Rica and Sally Burch from Ecuador and I were concerned to protect the interests of community media from governments that might say "you have the internet, you don't need broadcasting." We weren't successful in those efforts, but the alliances we formed continued.

Later in 2000, I took myself to Paris for the UNESCO Civil Society Consultation for the World Summits on the Information Society. This was the very beginning of the process, and a woman from the ITU gave an opening talk to tell us what they had planned. One of the first questions came from Anne Walker of the International Women's Tribune Centre, asking what was planned for women at these summits. The speaker didn't want to answer, so she just called on the next person with a hand up, which was me. I said, "I'll wait til you answer her question before I ask mine." Cornered, the official said they didn't want anything at the conference about women, or disability, or anything like that, they just wanted it to be about media. There were a lot of feminists and other media activists there, and as soon as she said that, we all pulled together to change that attitude. One of the first things that I did when I got home was go to the ITU website where they were taking input for the summit planning, and make the very first comment – a call for an additional basis of the Summits in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and then contact our networks and ask them to call for the same thing.

In the end, the ITU's commitment to include Civil Society in their deliberations was jettisoned, but Sally Burch in particular worked mightily on coalition-building and pulled together a Civil Society Declaration. I helped secure mutual endorsements between the Civil Society declaration and the women's declarations. At the final preparatory conference, the Civil Society Declaration was unanimously endorsed across all civil society regions and sectors, and our Declaration was the first to emerge from the process and got significant media attention. Overall, community radio seemed to be the big winner in terms of increased profile at the WSIS. But that's another story. Thank you for listening.