Mary P. Burke U.N. Women's Conference Collection (MS105),
1975-1995: A Finding Aid

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Descriptive Summary

Repository: Moakley Archive and Institute, Suffolk University, Boston, MA
Call Number: MS-105
Creator: Burke, Mary P.
Title: Mary P. Burke U.N. Women’s Conference Collection (MS105), 1975-1995
Date(s): 1975-1995
Quantity: 9.5 cubic feet in 19 document boxes, and 15 flat poster folders
Preferred Citation: Mary P. Burke U.N. Women’s Conference Collection (MS105), 1975-1995, Moakley Archive and Institute, Suffolk University, Boston, MA.
Abstract: The collection contains published materials, personal notes, and research materials pertaining to Suffolk University Professor Mary P. Burke’s involvement in the U.N. International Women’s Conferences and research into women and international development. The four U.N. conferences, held between 1975 and 1995, served as both a catalyst for and a sign of a revived international movement for women’s empowerment and equality.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information: Gift of Mary P. Burke, via the Center for Women’s Health and Human Rights at Suffolk University, 2004. Additional collection items donated by Mary P. Burke in May of 2020.
Access Restrictions: None
Use Restrictions: None
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Biographical Note

Mary P. Burke was born in Boston, Massachusetts on August 31, 1933. Over the course of five decades, she worked as a school teacher, a political organizer and a college professor. As a result of her involvement international development, Burke was a participating attendee at all four conferences: Mexico City in 1975; Copenhagen in 1980; Nairobi in 1985; and Beijing in 1995.

Burke was educated in Catholic primary and secondary schools in the Boston area and went on to receive a B.A. in chemistry from Emmanuel College in 1955. Upon graduation she began her career in education, teaching math and science at the secondary school level in public schools; a civilian teaching post with the U.S. Air Force Dependent School System and then gained international experience teaching in the Azores, Turkey, and Germany. During this time, she pursued graduate degrees in political science and became active in international development and political action with non-governmental
organizations (NGOs). She earned a Master’s in Political Science from Hunter College in 1970, and completed her Ph.D. at University of Connecticut in 1977.

Her Catholic upbringing and interest in NGOs brought her to the Center of Concern, an independent, interdisciplinary team engaged in social analysis, theological reflection, policy advocacy and public education programs on issues of peace and justice. From 1973 to 1981, Burke co-directed and implemented research and public education programs on the status of women internationally, with a focus on socio-economic development, work and church roles. She attended the first U.N. International Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975; the National Conference on Women in Houston in 1977 and the second U.N. International Women’s Conference in Copenhagen in 1980 as a representative of the Center for Concern. From 1980-1981, Burke traveled to various countries conducting research for a Walsh Price Fellowship, awarded by Maryknoll Fathers to investigate church issues in relation to international development. Her research topic was “The Changing Situation of Women: A Challenge to Evangelization.”

From 1982 to 1985, Burke diversified her work in international development, consulting with several organizations while also serving as Executive Director of the Coalition for Women in International Development. She coordinated several international conferences and worked as a project associate for Planning for Nairobi: Constructive U.S. Strategies for the 1985 U.N. Women’s Conference. She attended the third U.N. International Conference on Women, held in Nairobi in September of 1985.

Burke returned to higher education in 1987 and began at Suffolk University in 1989 as a visiting professor in the Government Department. In 1995, she took four Suffolk University students to the fourth U.N. International Women’s Conference in Beijing in 1995. She retired from the university as Professor Emeritus at the end of the 2004-2005 academic year.

**HISTORICAL NOTE**

The UN sponsored women’s conferences held between 1975 and 1995 served as both a catalyst for and sign of a revived international movement for women’s empowerment and equality. The first of these, convened in Mexico City in 1975, resulted in the drafting of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), an international human rights treaty addressing areas under-articulated in previous human rights agreements. Similarly the second, held in Copenhagen after prior plans to convene in Tehran were abruptly canceled, illuminated weaknesses in CEDAW and sparked a wave of worldwide advocacy for additional human rights instruments focused on eliminating violence against women in both the public and private spheres. The Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the 4th World Conference on Women (1995) remains the internationally agreed upon template for advancing women’s status today.
The forging of international agreements in support of women’s full participation in civil society and economic life would not have taken place without the constant presence of and continual pressure from women’s advocacy and grassroots organizations. From 1980 onward, such organizations, both those, like the Center of Concern, with consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council and those without met under the auspices of the NGO Forums organized in conjunction with the official United Nations Conferences, attended only by accredited NGO representatives and representatives of member nation states. At each conference, participation in the NGO Forums continued to grow, and the habits of advocacy and lobbying established at those forums was carried over to the 5- and 10-year appraisals of progress on implementation of the Platform for Actions, conducted by the United Nations at the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly and 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in 2000 and 2005 respectively. These follow-up meetings, held at the United Nations headquarters in New York, continued to attract broad participation from civil society organizations, with over 460 registered NGO delegates attending the Beijing +10 appraisal in 2005.

In aggregate, the Women’s Conferences are notable for opening new doors for professional and citizen involvement in international law and program development. The preparatory processes for these events continued to break new ground in combining traditional on-the-ground organizing and consensus building techniques with emerging on-line participatory and information sharing capabilities. United Nations agencies such as the Division for the Advancement of Women and UNIFEM, as well as new and emerging non-governmental organizations adopted new tactics for enhanced outreach and inclusion as well as new vehicles for prompting and maintaining institutional transparency and accountability. Through the NGO Forums and the conferences themselves, tens of thousands of women learned to take their ideas about equality, development and peace seriously as the basis for international policy and to forge the sorts of transnational alliances necessary to turn these ideas into reality on the ground.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection is comprised mainly of publications such as reports, booklets, and position papers derived from or relating to the four U.N. Conferences on Women since 1975, including pre- and post-conferences that gained national and international attention. Burke’s personal papers include notes, rough drafts and final published copies of her articles and those of friends or colleagues in the field of international development. There are also a significant number of draft reports that Burke was able to obtain from the U.S. government, national and international NGOs, and the U.N. Burke also collected items such as posters, commemorative stamps and publications, and newspapers produced at the conferences.

Browse digitized materials from this collection.
Related Materials: Professors Amy Agigian and Laura Roskos of the Suffolk University Center for Women's Health and Human Rights, conducted two audio interviews with Professor Burke that provide context to the documents in this collection. The interviews are transcribed and available for use at the Suffolk University Archives.

ARRANGEMENT

The collection is organized in the following Series and Sub-series:


Series 4: Women and Rural Development, 1979


Series 7: Center of Concern, 1972-1988

Series 8: Special Materials
- Books
- Conference Memorabilia
- Posters

Note: The materials related to U.N. Conferences were organized in the following sub-series: Conference, Post-conference, Research and MPB Personal Papers. Conference and post-conference documents tend to be grouped by their origination, the folder titles indicate the origination – “NGO”; “Governmental”; or “UN”– and the type of document: conference agendas or white papers, for example. Materials in the Research sub-series were collected by Prof. Burke either during the conference or during activities related to the conference. They are grouped by subject, office of origination, and format. MPB
Personal Papers are arranged generally by format -- such as notes, articles, or records – as indicated in the folder title.

**Series 1: Mexico City International Women’s Conference, June 19-July 2, 1975**

**Description:** The Mexico City International Women Conference was convened in commemoration for the first UN International Year of the Woman. NGOs held afternoon sessions following the “official” conference in the mornings. Due to its location, the first conference was dominated by the American presence and an agenda shaped by U.S.-style women’s movement issues. Because it was the first such conference, there was little or no preparatory work done either nationally or internationally. The first conference was notable mainly as a catalyst for national actions in a variety of countries, including the United States. These national activities stemmed from platform decisions made at the Mexico City conference.

- B1/F2: NGO Reports and Publications, 1974-1980
- B1/F5: Articles by MPB, May 1975-April 1976


**Description:** The Houston National Women’s Conference was a response to a call for local action decided upon during the Mexico City conference. The focus was on developing an agenda for a National Women’s Movement in the United States. This series is characteristically different from the Mexico City series, in that there was a great deal of pre-conference planning and meetings, as well as greater attention from the popular media.

- B1/F7: Conference actions Jordan, Barbara – speech ; conference program, November 18-21, 1977
- B1/F9: Conference newspaper, Daily Breakthrough, November 18, 1977
• B1/F11: Conference newspaper, *Daily Breakthrough*, November 20, 1977
• B1/F12: Magazine Articles: *European Community* and *Tim*, January / February 1978; December 5, 1977
• B1/F13: Religious NGO reports, December 5, 1977


**Description:** The Copenhagen International Women’s Conference was the second U.N. conference related to the International Decade of the Woman. The conference was originally scheduled in 1977 to take place in Tehran, but due to the revolution in the country and the installation of an Islamic fundamentalist government, the conference was banned. None the less, this conference was marked by a more organized community of international NGOs and a more sophisticated pre-conference planning network. This series includes interesting documentation of international preparatory conferences, media coverage, and the conferences and analytical papers that followed the conference.

**Sub-series A: Pre-Conference**

• B2/F21: Governmental Statements, July 14-30, 1980
• B3/F25: NGO Forum reports and publications, August 1980
• B3/F26: Conference newspaper *Forum*, July 15-30 1980
• B3/F28: Women and development reports prepared for U.S. delegation, 1979, June 1980
• B3/F29: Women and development NGO publications, 1980
Series 4: Women and Rural Development, 1974-1982

Description: Women and Development is a recurring research theme throughout Professor Burke, and in particular Women and Rural Development gained intensive international focus between the 1980 international conference in Copenhagen and the 1985 conference in Nairobi. In addition to research material on this topic, this series also includes materials from two international conferences in 1979. World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development FAO Rome, 1979 Bureau of Resource Assessment and Land Use Planning (BRALUP) Conference, Tanzania,

- B4/F34: World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development FAO Rome U.N. reports, July 1979
- B4/F35: NGO reports, 1979
- B4/F37: Bureau of Resource Assessment and Land Use Planning (BRALUP) Conference, Tanzania, Workshops and conference proceedings, September 1978
- B4/F38: Africa - NGO publications (folder 1 of 2), 1979-1982
- B4/F40: Africa - NGO publications and Marilyn Carr article, 1978
- B5/F41: Global issues - NGO publications, 1978-1979
- B5/F43: Global issues, 1979-1980
- B5/F44: Family planning issues, 1974-1976, 1979

Description: The Nairobi International Women’s Conference was the third U.N. conference related to the International Decade of the Woman. This conference was marked by a more organized community of international NGOs, as well as increased tension between global groups and United States-based women’s organizations. Specifically, the equal-rights issues in America often took a back seat to issues affecting poverty, family, and personal security in developing countries. American NGOs came prepared to educate their own constituents about international development issues and cultural sensitivity; MPB prepared two workshops on the subject.

Domestically, the U.S. government had taken a somewhat hostile approach to the NGO Forum, and is reflected in the media reports. This series includes a rich array of NGO publications; media reports about the tensions described above, and increased pre- and post-conference activity. Additionally, there is a group of speeches delivered at a preparatory forum by notables such as former Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young and UN delegate Dame Anita Barrows.

- B6/F48: Planning Committee, NGO Activities for the 1985 World Conference of the UN Decade for Women, March 1984
- B6/F49: NGO Pre-conferences reports, May – October 1984
- B6/F50: NGO Pre-conferences programs, June 14, 1985
- B6/F51: NGO Pre-conferences speeches: Dame Nita Barrows and Mayor Andrew Young, May 22, 1985
- B6/F52: NGO Religious – MPB research notes, 1985
- B6/F53: NGO Religious- outreach, July 1985
- B6/F54: NGO Religious - public statements, 1985
- B6/F55: NGO reports, 1984-1985
- B6/F56: Overseas Education Fund, September 11, 1984
- B7/F62: Governments - U.S. reports to U.N. (folder 2 of 2), June 1984
- B7/F63: NGO- Forum 85 newspapers, July 16 -30 1985
- B7/F64: NGO Forum official programs, May 1985; July 11-19, 1985
- B7/F65: NGO Presentations and reports, July 1985
- B7/F66: Religious NGO newspapers, September – October 1985
- B7/F69: Media coverage, July 1985
- B8/F70: U.S. Government reports, January 1986
- B8/F71: Media coverage, August 2, 1985

Description: The Beijing International Women’s Conference held in 1995 was perceived as having a more open process than past conferences in terms of preparatory activities and U.S. government participation. The U.S. Department of States, which typically appoints and steers the U.S. Delegation, sponsored preparatory activities, held platform
discussions, and officially welcomed the participation of NGOs at the conferences. President Clinton appointed First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton to steer the Presidential Interagency Council on Women following the conference.

This series includes documents related to the Interagency Council; a Department of State preparatory conference; and documents depicting a larger array of activities sponsored by nonprofit institutions such as universities and charitable foundations.

- **B10/F106**: U.N. reports, April 1994
- **B10/F107**: NGO Forum – newsletters and bulletins, 1994-1995
- **B10/F110**: NGO Forum – U.S. delegation materials, July – August, 1995
- **B10/F111**: NGO – Pre-conferences, 1994-1995
- **B10/F112**: NGO – publications, n.d.
- **B10/F113**: NGO – religious, Center of Concern, 1995
- **B11/F114**: NGO – religious, statements, 1993-1995
- **B11/F115**: NGO – U.S. activities, 1994
- **B11/F116**: NGO – U.S. conferences, 1995
- **B11/F117**: NGO – U.S. conferences, speech by Madeline K. Albright, August 2, 1995
- **B11/F118**: NGO - U.S. platform actions, July 1995
- **B11/F119**: Pre-conferences – general, 1994-1995
- **B11/F120**: U.N. informational material and NGO consultation, March 3-4, 1994
- **B11/F121**: U.N. newsletters and bulletins, 1994-1995
- **B11/F122**: U.N. reports, 1994-1995
- **B11/F123**: U.S. Preparatory meeting (folder 1 of 2), September 8, 1994
- **B11/F124**: U.S. Preparatory meeting (folder 2 of 2), September 8, 1994
- **B11/F125**: Conference materials – Chinese Organizing Committee, 1994
- **B11/F126**: U.S. Government reports to U.N., 1985-19994
- **B11/F127**: Media coverage, September 1995
- **B11/F128**: NGO Forum newspaper, Forum ’95, August 31 – September 8, 1995
- **B11/F129**: NGO Forum - programs and agendas, September 1995
- **B12/F130**: NGO Forum – statements & reports, August –September 1995
- **B12/F131**: NGO newsletters, August – November 1995
- **B12/F132**: Virginia Commonwealth University readings packet, August – September 1995
- **B12/F133**: Virginia Commonwealth University conference and travel information kit, August – September 1995
- **B12/F134**: U.N. Conference newspaper, September 1-8, 1995
- **B12/F135**: U.N. Publications, September 4-11, 1995
- **B12/F136**: Media coverage, October 1996
• B12/F137: NGO activities, February 26, 1996
• B12/F138: NGO publications, 1996
• B12/F139: NGO religious – Center of Concern, November 1995 – 1996
• B12/F140: NGO religious – articles and reports, December 1995 – May 1996
• B12/F141: President’s Interagency Council on Women, May –June 1996
• B12/F142: NGO – U.S. conferences, 1995-1996
• B12/F143: U.N. newsletters and bulletins, January 1996
• B13/F144: Child sex trade, Christian Science Monitor, August - September 1996
• B13/F145: Gender roles, 1989-1993
• B13/F147: Status of women – NGO publications, n.d.
• B13/F149: Women and development - NGO publications, 1994-1995
• B13/F150: Women and development U.N. publications, 1994-1995
• B13/F152: Women and health, 1996
• B13/F153: Women in China – Chinese publications, n.d
• B13/F154: Women’s movement, 1996
• B13/F155: Conference notes, n.d.
• B13/F156: Conference planning, 1993-1994
• B13/F157: Articles by MPB, 1995
• B13/F158: Suffolk Journal article about MPB, April 20, 1994
• B13/F159: MPB’s CLAS seminar flyer, April 4, 1995
• B13/F160: Miscellaneous, 1994-1996
• B13/F161: Records and receipts, Various dates
• B13/F162: Press credentials, Various dates

Series 7: Center of Concern, 1972-1988

Description: This series is tied together by Professor Burke’s research interests in women and church in relation to international development. It contains records and research materials related to Burke’s staff work for Center of Concern, as well as research materials from her travels for the Walsh Price Fellowship. During both these endeavors, Burke sought out information about issues that could help Catholic-based NGOs address the needs of women around the world.

• B14/F163: Center of Concern, activities by Dana Greer and Maria Riley, 1980-1987
• B14/F164: Center of Concern, Occasional Paper – “Eve and Mary Are Our Stem All Our Centuries Go Back to Them”, Maria Riley, April 1984
• B14/F165: Center of Concern, Pre-Copenhagen memorandums, February – July, 1980
- B14/F166: Women and Church: Article by Donald W. McKinney “But Man Sounds Better!” – First Unitarian Church Brooklyn, N.Y., February 17, 1980
- B14/F167: Women and Church: Laity Role in Catholic Church, 1976-1983
- B14/F169: Women and Church: NC Documentary Service, October 5, 1972
- B14/F170: Women and Church: Ordination of women, 1974-1978
- B14/F171: Women and Church: UCWO (Union of Catholic Women’s Organizations) papers, 1977-1980
- B14/F173: Woman-Church Speaks/Mujer-Iglesia Habla Conference Roster, November 12-13, 1983
- B14/F174: Woman Church, April 1982; November-December 1983
- B14/F175: Women-Church : Claiming Our Power, conference materials, October 9-11, 1987
- B14/F176: Women and Ministry, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, July 1, 1980
- B15/F178: Women Moving Church Project, note to MPB, June 4, 1981
- B15/F179: Women’s Movement and the Church, various publications, 1975-1983
- B15/F180: Women’s Ordination Conference Newspaper, New Women, New Church, November – December, 1988
- B15/F181: Reaching for Justice: the Women’s Movement, promotional flyer, 1980
- B15/F182: Reaching for Justice, Proof copy with margin notes, n.d.
- B15/F183: Reaching for Justice, research material from WUCO – Canon Law 767, September – December, 1978
- B15/F184: Article on arranged marriages in India from Asia magazine, February 1982
- B15/F186: Women and Development, December 1982
- B15/F187: Women of Power, Summer 1987
- B15/F188: Articles collected by MPB, 1981-1985
- B15/F189: Notes and articles on various church issues, Various dates
- B15/F190: Suffolk University Women’s Center newsletter and notes, April 1986
- B16/F194: “American Women” booklet and Business and Professional Women’s Organization program, 1983
- B16/F195: Women Make A Difference - Rutgers, 1983

**Description:** This series contains objects, such as books, posters and memorabilia collected at the conferences. Generally, the books were collected in relation to research topics rather than in direct relation to a particular conference. The materials are listed according to the title provided on the object or by topic in objects without a title. Items moved from other parts of the collection are noted in the container list.

**Books**


• B18/F214: *Bibliography of Bangladesh Women with Annotation*, Mahmuda Islam, ca.1978.


**Conference Memorabilia**

• B19/F219: Province Annual Seminar, Lagos - visitor pass, August 1980

• B19/F220: Forum ’85 badge, July 10-19, 1985

• B19/F221: Nairobi Conference commemorative stamp flyer and postcards, 1985

• B19/F222: Beijing Conference badge and MPB’s passport photos, 1995

• B19/F223: Beijing stamps and wrapping paper, 1995

• B19/F224: “A Beijing Book of Days” planner, 1995

• B19/F225: Beijing cloth tote bags (2) and silk cloth with conference logo, 1995

**Posters** *(Stored separately in flat file drawers)*

• D6/Item 1: American Women on the Move, Houston, Texas (28” x 20 ½”), Nov. 1977 (Digitized Materials Available: ms-0097))

• D6/Item 2: Den Alternative Kvindekonference 80 (17 ¼” x 24 ¼”), 1980 (Digitized Materials Available: ms-0096)


• D6/Item 4: Give Peace A Chance, poster from an exhibit at UN headquarters (18” x 14”), 1986

• D6/Item 5: UN Soldiers of Peace, poster from an exhibit at NYC headquarters (18” x 14”), [1986]


• D6/Items 7-9: Pre-Beijing Conference Planning, 3-part series (22” x 17”), [1994]
- D6/Item 10: U.N. World Conference on Women and NGO Forum ’95, Beijing (11” x 25”), 1995
- D6/Item 11: Map of the NGO Forum ’95 (20” x 30”), 1995
- D6/Item 12: UNICEF Woman and Development (25 5/8” W x 19 ¼” L), n.d.
- D6/Item 14: We the People of the United Nations, n.d.