

## Statement on Sexism and the Rights of Women:

*[A statement released by the General Conference Office of Women's Ministries in connection with the kick-off of "The Year of the Adventist Woman," January 9, 1995.]*

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has declared 1995 to be The Year of the Adventist Woman. As the women of the Seventh-day Adventist church both seek and share affirmation during this year, we also desire to improve the world around us. It is with great distress and concern that we see the difficulties, burdens, and hardships suffered by so many women, our sisters, around the world. We observe this condition to be true whether in developed or in developing nations, in lands at peace or in areas of crises caused by war or natural disaster.

We view with distress the great gap between the rights of women called for in the United Nations' *Convention on The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* and the reality of the world around us. We too are convinced that "discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity,..." and that it does in fact hamper "the growth of the prosperity of society and the family and makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity." (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979).

As Christians we believe that all people are created in the image of a loving God. Because of our gratitude for what God has done for us through the Savior, we believe it is our duty and privilege to reach out to each other in support, to lift the burden of trouble or despair whenever and however possible. We also believe in sharing the joys and satisfaction of being a woman of God.

The standard for Seventh-day Adventist Christians is acknowledged in the church's Bible-based Fundamental Belief No. 13, "Unity in the Body of Christ." Here it is pointed out: "In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and

female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation."

The Seventh-day Adventist Church deplores all forms of sexism or any form of discrimination based on one's gender. There must not be a seeking for power over any other individual based on gender, but an encouraging of power within each woman and man that allows her or him to reach out to work with others and for the betterment of all.

Seventh-day Adventists want to be faithful to the reconciling ministry assigned to the Christian church. As a worldwide community of faith, the Seventh-day Adventist Church wishes to witness to and exhibit in her own ranks the fairness, the equality and love that transcend gender differences and overcome past alienation based on gender. Sexist discrimination is an offense against our fellow human beings, who are created in God's image.

We believe all persons are blessed with a free will. We affirm that each person, woman as well as man, should be the one to make decisions regarding the issues that most affect them and their own lives. Of basic concern, is our belief that women should have the right to free and unrestricted religious choices. We believe that we should respect the wishes and desires of the others in our family but we are each accountable for our own actions and for our own relationship with the Creator of the Universe.

We believe that each woman has the right to an education to the extent that it is available to anyone in the community. According to the United Nations, there are over 100,000,000 adult illiterates in the world today, three-fourths of them women. We maintain that until a woman has the right to a basic education and the right to gain literacy, she will not be able to feed her family properly, give them health care, help with the family or nation's economy, know her own religious values or have respect for her own individual person. When the woman can read, the family will also have access to literacy.

We believe that a woman has a right to protection and dignity of her own body and

mind. Violence against any human being is wrong and a woman has the right to freedom from mental, physical or sexual abuse, including in her home and family.

We believe further that a woman has the right to health information and care, that her special needs as a woman must be addressed by research, and her individual needs be given respectful attention.

We believe that a woman has the right to equal rewards and support for work performed in the work place or the home. As a woman participates in the work place, whether out of economic necessity or for personal reasons, the conditions, remuneration, and length of the work day must be addressed to lessen stress, fatigue and burnout.

Finally, we believe that because of changes in status, work, and responsibilities, a woman must have access to leadership training and mentoring from both men and women so that she too may enjoy success in all areas of the home, the community, and the place of worship.

We hold that a woman, as well as a man, has the right to these privileges, whether she or he believes in the same way we do or not. While a woman's rights will result in economic and environmental benefits to all, a woman should not have these rights on that basis alone. She should have these rights because she is a human being.

We call on all Seventh-day Adventists and others of good will to help create an atmosphere of freedom, growth, equality and good will toward all women in their family, their community and their religious community that will lead to the ability of each woman to use her individual gifts to the fullest potential.

Ellen G. White, one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, said over a hundred years ago, "When a great and decisive work is to be done, God chooses men and women to do this work, and it will see the loss if the talents of both are not combined" (E. G. White, *Evangelism*, page 469).