

# Women fight for gender-conscious resolutions

Too few women found themselves at the

SECOND INDIAN OCEAN RIM CONFERENCE, notes COSATU administrator MATAPELO MAKGOMA who was there.

**T**his conference (December 1992) mirrored the situation in the trade union movement – not only in our country but throughout the world. It was attended by about 13 countries on the Indian Ocean Rim. But out of 72 delegates, only 12 were women.

If one looks at the women delegates themselves, one noticed only one comrade who was an office bearer of a union, not a federation. She was Cde Uma Maheswari from India, vice-president of the insurance union in Madras. All other women delegates were workers and union officials who did not have influence in their unions. They came to share their experiences as workers faced by different situations.

Out of the discussion we discovered that women

## women IN THE UNIONS



constitute the majority of working people in all countries, but that few hold decision-making positions. A lot of potential leadership could be developed if women were given a chance. But other factors also hinder women's growth, like:

- cultural background;*
- the domestic division of labour in society as a whole;*
- the laws of individual countries;*
- lack of facilities, preventing women from taking part in certain activities;*
- being made to feel insecure in their jobs; being made to believe that only through fearing and respecting men will they retain their posts;*
- education and a working environment not conducive to women's development.*

I could set an example with the women of Indonesia, where a worsening of the economy has aggravated unemployment, and has led to massive migration by women.

Free Trade Zones have been used to force workers, mostly women, to compete for lower and lower wages.

It was amazing how women

delegates fought to ensure that resolutions adopted by the conference also included those of women. These were integrated into the final Indian Ocean Rim resolution document.

Some resolutions adopted for circulation at our various centres/federations were:

- As regards exchange programmes:
  - to ensure, when organising exchange programmes in areas where women predominate, that women be involved;
  - to ensure that all exchange programmes have a gender component.
- In relation to research:
  - to consider industries where women predominate;
  - to look at the impact political and economic restructuring in each country will have on women workers;
  - to check out issues of concern to women workers.
- In the field of communication:
  - to set up a network of organisations attending the conference;
  - to publish a newsletter twice a year containing issues from different countries (participating countries will feed into that publication);
  - to establish a network of women from the participating countries;
  - to establish a co-ordinating committee, on which at least one woman will sit – BUT NOT ONLY AS A TOKEN! ☆