

Women are offering new leadership — President

By Mary Cummins, Women's Affairs Correspondent
 "MNÁ an Domhain" became part of the new vocabulary created by the President, Mrs Robinson, when she launched the Global Forum of Women with President Vigdis Finnbogadóttir of Iceland at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin yesterday.

The two presidents got a rapturous reception from the several hundred delegates from some 49 countries. Many from African and Asian countries who wore national dress threw a refreshing dash of exotic colour into the otherwise dull and functional auditorium. The stage set for the current production of "Drama at Innish" also helped to lighten the bunker-like effect.

However, apart from vigorous clapping and a couple of "yahoo" shrieks, the overall tone was polite and subdued but perfectly tuned, as befitted the input of Garry Hynes, the Abbey's artistic director, who will be speaking at the summit. Young women musicians, in a duo called Dordonn, interspersed the proceedings with Irish airs and Máire Ní Dhnóinnail sang poignant songs in Irish.

Ms Monica Barnes TD, who has been co-ordinating the Irish secretariat with Dr Margret Fine-Davis of Trinity College, had a ring of satisfaction in her voice when she introduced "the only two elected women Heads of State in the world".

Several of the internationally known women who were to attend had to withdraw at the last moment. These included Ms Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Ms Betty Bigombe from Uganda and the writer, Alice Walker.

The theme of the summit, which begins this morning at Jurys Hotel, is "New Visions of Leadership", and, in her speech, Mrs Robinson cautioned the delegates on the dangers and responsibilities that go with achieving eminence.

Much of her speech was devoted to the "visionary" aspects of communal leadership, which was being pioneered and shaped

by women. This method of dialogue and co-operation was "fresh, radical, blurs old distinctions and heals old divisions". In this context, she warned the audience, most of whom are achievers in a wide variety of areas, to take this approach: "It would be very easy for any of us as women, placed in positions of responsibility, to ignore the dialogue in favour of the older methods of traditional leadership: where individual action is seen as solitary reward."

President Finnbogadóttir congratulated Ireland for holding the summit, although it is reliably believed that it only came to Dublin after being turned down by Iceland. Sources have said that the demands of the United States organisers were considered "too rigid" by the Icelandic women.

Ms Finnbogadóttir, in the course of an alternately serious and light address, said women must be very cautious when embarking on freedom. Their main threat was mockery and anything that could cause it. If one woman was criticised, it reflected on all women. If this happened with men, it was usually only reduced to an aspersion on their nationality. In this respect, women were treated as more global and more cosmopolitan, a phenomenon that did not apply to men, she said to laughter.

Since the initial complaints about the overall price of £180 to attend the summit, the Irish organisers have made bursaries available to women's groups and each session can be attended for a once-off fee of £15. Several Irish speakers will also take part over the next few days, including the politicians, Ms Mary O'Rourke and Mrs Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, as well as Ms Patricia O'Donovan, assistant secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. President Robinson concluded her address with a few short lines:

Tá mná na hÉireann molta agam

— Sean scéal sin eadrainn tá. Anois, a mhna an domhain mhóir

Fearaim romhaibh fáilte is grá.



Presidents two: President Robinson with President Vigdis Finnbogadóttir of Iceland at the opening of a women's global summit in Dublin yesterday. Photograph: Joe St Leger.

Women urged to boycott globe-threatening goods

By Eileen Battersby

BEING female is no longer enough, warned an Indian economist when addressing a lunchtime seminar on Women and the Environment in Dublin.

Urging a new practicality among the world's women, who are faced with increasing environmental destruction, Ms Devaki Jain said: "It is time we stopped congratulating ourselves and did something." According to her, "women don't like to waste time", but she commented on the amount of information which is now available but which is yet to be transferred into practical use.

Earlier, the theme of "networking" among women had been introduced by Ms Pauline Eccles, co-ordinator of the Women in Development Europe group. Ms Jain admitted that networking among women, and

all such alliances, "are actually very difficult" because of traditionally practical differences such as race, culture, wealth and expectations.

She pointed out that whereas previously, the world was divided into rich and poor societies, now it was being viewed as a place made up of waste generating, waste re-cycling and waste avoiding societies. She said we should boycott goods produced by environmentally threatening methods. Women hold the monopoly on consumer power, being responsible for 70 per cent of items purchased.

According to Ms Sharon Capeling, director of the United Nations Fund for Women, of some 400 speeches heard at the recent Global Conference in Rio de Janeiro, "only 15 were delivered by women". Ms Capeling compared the women's lobby at

the UN to the grain of sand busy at work within an oyster's shell. "Our job is to irritate." She said that women, because of their role within the home, "shoulder the burden of the degradation of the global environment".

Ms Capeling, who spoke of the unpaid labour of women and of the importance of stressing the "female advantage", nominated the President, Mrs Robinson, as "a practical example of what we talk about when we refer to the female advantage".

Obviously unimpressed by the under-representation of women she experienced at the Global Conference, Ms Capeling's indignation was summed up by her comment: "Once we got to Rio, it was about separating not the men from the boys, but the men from the women."



Jinqing Cai: who yesterday attended the Global Forum of Women in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin.