

March 1977

**REPORT ON**  
**THE CONCERNS OF FOREIGN SERVICE**  
**SPOUSES AND FAMILIES**

**The Forum of the Association of  
American Foreign Service Women**

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The Forum Report and Recommendations have been approved by  
the Board of the Association of  
American Foreign Service Women

The Women's Action Organization endorses and supports  
strongly the findings of the Forum.

## The Concerns of Foreign Service Families

### Background

The AAFSW Forum was established in August, 1976 to identify and analyze "The Concerns of Foreign Service Women and Families" and to recommend possible actions that the Department of State might take.

Five study groups--Family Life, the Modern Foreign Service Wife, Orientation, Re-entry, and Women in Transition (retirement, widowhood, and divorce)--have met under the Forum project to consider specific aspects of Foreign Service life. The chairman of each study group sits on the Steering Committee, which meets regularly to coordinate the project.

The Forum attempted to involve as many women as possible in the project by mailings to over 9,000 Foreign Service spouses and by publicity in the Department of State and AAFSW newsletters. All interested spouses, whether members of AAFSW or not, were invited to participate.

In the Washington area, the Forum collected information for this report from letters and telephone conversations, at an Open Meeting held Sunday, November 7, and at meetings at post. All participation in this project has been voluntary.

In addition, the Research Committee on Spouses, the Spouses' Skills/Talent Bank, and the Workshop for Foreign Service Families at the Foreign Service Institute have contributed to the project.

This report concentrates by necessity on the concerns of Foreign Service families and allows little room for mentioning the positive benefits of Foreign Service life. We wish to express our awareness and appreciation of what is already being done for Foreign Service employees and their families. We hope that the forwarding of these concerns will give the families and the Department of State an opportunity to work together to make Foreign Service life as rewarding as possible.

### The Problem

The concerns of Foreign Service spouses are both "Service-related" and "role-related." The Forum recognizes fully the Department of State's willingness and effort to minimize service-related problems--those that are caused or aggravated by constant mobility and world-wide service. Continued constructive attention to these concerns will benefit both the Foreign Service and the individual, improving morale and employee performance.

Role-related concerns are more difficult to define. In the last 15 years, the political, social and economic role of women in America has changed significantly. Increased mobility, smaller families, higher levels of education and economic necessity have combined to alter the American woman's way of life.

In 1960, 33% of the work force were women; today that percentage is 40.7%, and 48% of American women over age 16 are gainfully employed outside the home. Women who do not work occupy an increasingly important role in the family, in family decision-making, and in the community. Women are now more independent, economically and socially, and are recognized as such by society and by themselves.

In 1972, the Department of State recognized these societal changes and the increasing dissatisfaction with the "two for the price of one" philosophy. It declared that spouses were no longer to be treated as associate employees of the Department of State, and their contribution or lack of contribution to the Foreign Service community could no longer be mentioned in the employee's personnel file or efficiency reports. The 1972 Policy Statement on Wives was hailed as an important first step in eliminating many of the injustices of the past.

However, this policy does not deal effectively with the realities of Foreign Service life, since Foreign Service spouses will always be a part of the "system", especially abroad where they are dependent on Departmental services and implicitly responsible to a larger community. Most Foreign Service wives recognize this paradox and have struggled since 1972 to reconcile their formal independence with the continuing demands and responsibilities of Foreign Service life.

This contradiction causes very real problems for Foreign Service spouses--problems which have a significant effect on the Foreign Service as a whole. Spouses are

frustrated by the Department's inability to adapt fully to the changing role of women in society. They feel that the Foreign Service is unaware of their diverse abilities and their desire to make a contribution, though not necessarily through representational entertaining. This frustration, coupled with the service-related problems discussed below, often produces extreme disenchantment with Foreign Service life and reduces family commitment to the Foreign Service.

The Forum recognizes that the foreign affairs agencies have little control over the forces that have led to a reappraisal of the women's role in the family and community. It is equally apparent that Foreign Service wives cannot request blanket permission to "do their own thing" while expecting the foreign affairs agencies to nurture them with additional services. However, it is important for the welfare of individuals and the Service to work together to deal with these concerns.

Participants in this study believe that the Department of State can help resolve these concerns by (1) developing new ways to view and treat spouses as assets in the foreign affairs effort, and (2) ensuring that the disadvantages of Foreign Service do not outweigh its benefits.

The Forum study groups have identified specific concerns which are discussed below:

The FAMILY LIFE study group concentrated its research on the concerns and experiences of families with children. Letters to the Committee consistently listed four major areas of concern: (1) rearing and educating children, (2) family health, (3) family participation at post, and (4) difficulties with support services. Some families are becoming increasingly reluctant to serve overseas, particularly at hardship posts, despite pay differentials. Many questioned whether present conditions of life in the Foreign Service permit them to realize their family goals. They consider the frequent changes of climate, culture and languages, the repeated remaking of the home environment in all its material and psychological complexity, the uncertainty of education good enough to meet today's competitive standards, plus the varied physical and financial stresses and ask, "Are we preparing our children adequately for their future?" "Is life in the Foreign Service worth the hassle?"

The study group on the MODERN FOREIGN SERVICE WIFE focussed on the present, unsatisfactory relationship between the Department of State and spouses and its effect on the resolution of urgent concerns. Since 1972, this relationship has been based on a denial of mutual obligations and responsibilities while, in fact, diplomatic life imposes limitations and responsibilities on both the Department and spouses. Without more effective communication and a new understanding and definition of this relationship, specific mutual problems cannot be addressed. One of these problems is the inequity of implicit representational responsibilities. Although wives are no longer required to entertain, the need for representation continues. Women feel there has been no realistic assessment of what must be done in the Foreign Service community, who will do it, and how they will do it, and how they will be compensated for it. The most crucial concern addressed by the study group is the widespread dissatisfaction with the lack of employment and career opportunities for spouses. Women cannot participate fully in society because the opportunities to pursue their own intellectual and professional development are limited.

Foreign Service spouses possess a wide variety of professional and technical skills, as documented by the SPOUSES' SKILLS/TALENT BANK. However, the Department has yet to establish a mechanism by which such skills can be identified and utilized in the best interests of the foreign affairs community and the individual family unit. Lack of progress in this area continues to affect morale, a family's willingness to serve abroad and the ability of the Foreign Service family abroad to demonstrate the positive aspects of American life. The creation of a centralized skills bank would be seen by employees and spouses alike as a demonstration of positive concern for the welfare and social and professional fulfillment of all Foreign Service individuals and a creative utilization of previously untapped individual resources.

Foreign Service families spend a significant portion of their time adjusting to new surroundings and circumstances, so much so that one wife described her time in the Foreign Service as "life among the packing crates." Some families become acclimated more quickly than others, but all agree that the transitions--whether the family moves to a post abroad, returns to Washington, or leaves the Foreign Service altogether--impose unique stresses on the family. The following paragraphs summarize the findings of the study groups that concentrated on these transitions.

The study group on ORIENTATION AND TRAINING found that many spouses are poorly prepared for life in the Foreign Service. Basic information about the obligations and options of Foreign Service spouses would help prepare women for the demands of diplomatic life. However, many families cannot attend basic training in Washington for financial reasons, and many spouses do not see published material, such as the new pamphlet for married applicants, because it is not brought to their attention. Wives at all levels stressed the importance of improved training opportunities, especially language training in Washington and at post, that would enhance their contribution to the community abroad and facilitate a smooth adjustment to life in foreign cultures. Spouses' participation in programs at FSI is limited by the "space available" requirement, and many cannot attend courses at all because of conflicting responsibilities and the lack of child care facilities. Families need more take-home training material, printed materials and cassettes, to prepare them for overseas assignments.

For many Foreign Service wives, RE-ENTRY to the United States from abroad is a time of severe stress, a transition that has not been fully appreciated by the Department of State. For families that have served many years abroad, re-adjustment to life in the United States is similar to adjustment to life in a foreign country. Families must make immediate decisions about housing, education and, frequently, medical treatment--decisions requiring basic information that is often difficult to obtain. The Foreign Service wife often suffers an "identity crisis" caused by adjusting to a new lifestyle, trying to resume a career or an education interrupted by overseas assignment, and struggling with the feeling that she is a stranger in her own country. These stresses converge to make re-entry to the United States a difficult experience.

The study group on WOMEN IN TRANSITION found that retirement does not appear to present major adjustment problems, perhaps because the transition is expected and the family unit is still intact. Widowed and divorced women, however, feel vulnerable and unprepared for life in today's society. Most women who now face widowhood or divorce had "served" with their husbands in the old sense of the word. Their future has been clouded by the personal sacrifice made in serving overseas in a role secondary to that of their husbands. If the foreign affairs agencies work to allow women to develop independent roles and financial security, as suggested elsewhere in this report, this problem may diminish. In the meantime,



divorced and widowed women need a service within the Department that can give them information, legal assistance and counseling. While these women do not blame the Department for their personal problems, they feel their transition is more difficult because of the nature of their Foreign Service experiences.

Recommendations:

1. Establish a new relationship between the Department of State and the spouses of Foreign Service employees, based on a recognition of mutual responsibilities.
2. Create a Family Liaison Office (FLO) headed by a director who is directly responsible to the Deputy Under Secretary for Management and who works in close cooperation with M/DG, M/FSI, M/MED and M/MO. This office would assist State, USIA and AID family members and should be established through a joint cooperative effort between Foreign Service families and employees of the Department of State. FLO should:
  - (1) Provide regular and dependable dissemination of information from the foreign affairs agencies to family members in Washington and abroad, and (2) Communicate the views and needs of Foreign Service families to the foreign affairs agencies, especially on policy matters and planning affecting their welfare.

FLO should act as a central clearing house of all information pertinent to Foreign Service families. The office should direct family members to up-to-date information on facilities abroad, including post reports, slides and videotapes. The office should be a center of information on all regulations affecting family members, such as regulations on training, moving, family health, widowhood, retirement, and employment opportunities. Written memoranda on these subjects in a format suitable for filing in a loose-leaf notebook would be helpful. A well-informed administrative officer should be present to answer questions and brief family members. The office should become familiar with all services available to Foreign Service families (such as FSECC, FSI, medical services, AAFSW services and community resources) and should publicize these services as appropriate.

FLO should insure the provision of confidential psychological and family counseling by a sensitive and knowledgeable person to assist family members

facing service-related problems or crisis situations. This service exists for USIS and AID families in their respective agencies, so referral and cooperation would be necessary. This special assistance and advisory service is especially important for widows and divorced dependants.

FLO should initiate direct contact with spouses of candidates for Foreign Service employment to insure that they receive a full appreciation of Foreign Service life before the family enters the Foreign Service. Following the candidate's decision to enter the Foreign Service, the office should maintain direct contact with the spouse.

FLO should initiate frequent contact with posts abroad, providing up-to-date information pertinent to families living abroad or preparing to return to Washington.

FLO should act as a liaison with individuals and organizations such as AAFSW, WAO and AFSA on all matters pertaining to family members and should assist these organizations upon request whenever possible.

The Spouses' Skills/Talent Bank should be institutionalized within FLO to encourage and facilitate the utilization of the individual talents of spouses. Career counseling for spouses should be provided, and the information gathered by the Skills/Talent Bank should be used to expand employment opportunities as described in recommendation #7.

FLO should be staffed by at least four full-time professionals (director, information specialist, skills bank coordinator, counselor) and adequate secretarial support, and should be able to fund the programs described.

3. Improve the training provided spouses to insure that it meets their needs. Training in languages and other cross-cultural skills (full or part-time, take home and at post) should be a priority. The materials in the FSI seminars on Family Living, Money Management and Career Planning are vitally important and should be available to all families in the Foreign Service community. These and other orientation materials on re-entry and community participation should be available in written form, on cassettes, or on

videotapes for use by families who are unable to attend FSI and for distribution overseas. Child care facilities should be provided at FSI. Recognizing that the spouse is an important part of the diplomatic unit, the Department should authorize per diem for family members to accompany the employee to Washington for orientation, training and consultation.

4. Review and clarify representational responsibilities and explore ways to compensate spouses for their work and expenses.
5. The 30-day temporary housing allowance for families returning to Washington should be extended. The Department of State should recognize the special travel needs of families fragmented by divorce and provide appropriate travel allowances.
6. Review the quality of medical care provided for Foreign Service families, particularly at posts abroad, and take prompt action to improve medical care worldwide. Counseling for mental health problems must be expanded, using para-professional counselors abroad. The assignment process should include a thorough consideration of all family members. Medical personnel in Washington should recognize and understand the stresses of Foreign Service life and be more sensitive in their dealings with family members.
7. Recognize the diverse skills and talents of spouses and work to integrate these into the post community abroad. Maintain a catalog (the Spouses' Skills/Talent Bank) of contract positions, positions in American businesses, foreign country resource needs, legal requirements and family member skills. Reinforce and implement existing regulations to facilitate and encourage the employment of spouses overseas.
8. Review family educational requirements and work to minimize the adverse effects of Foreign Service life on educational continuity. Work with family members to improve standards of State Department supported schools, up-date educational allowances, provide standardized testing for dependents abroad and re-assess assistance for handicapped dependents. Provide two paid trips per year for dependents age 22 and under to visit parents at post. FSECC has offered to prepare a complete and frequently up-dated re-entry package on schools in the Washington area; this project should be funded by the foreign affairs agencies.

9. Provide financial support for ad hoc community efforts (part-time work, clubs, special activities) to improve teen-age morale abroad.
10. Improve evacuation procedures by sending a specially trained TDY officer to safehaven posts to help evacuees with information, counseling and financial assistance.
11. Meet with Forum participants to promote mutual understanding and cooperation regarding the above recommendations.

Attachments:

- Tab 1. Family Life Study Group Report
- Tab 2. The Modern Foreign Service Wife Study Group Report
- Tab 3. The Spouses' Skills/Talent Bank Report
- Tab 4. Orientation and Training Study Group Report
- Tab 5. Re-entry Study Group Report
- Tab 6. Women in Transition (Retirement, Widowhood and Divorce) Study Group Report

## Family Life Study Group Report

The morale and well being of U.S. Government employees and their families overseas are crucial factors in the excellence of the employee's performance. We, the members of the Family Life committee, have been gathering information from spouses here and abroad about their experiences in rearing children overseas. Some employees are becoming increasingly reluctant to serve overseas--particularly at hardship posts, despite pay differentials. We have received many letters questioning whether present conditions of life in the Foreign Service are a satisfactory way to realize their family goals.

When they consider the frequent changes of climate, culture and languages, the repeated remaking of the home environment in all its material and psychological complexity, the uncertainty of education good enough to meet today's competitive standards, plus the varied financial stresses, families are asking themselves: "Are we preparing our children adequately for their future?" "Is life in the Foreign Service worth the hassle?" One woman phrased her concern: "It is one thing to sacrifice one's own comfort and well being to a cause, but one has no right to sacrifice one's children's future to a personal choice."

Letters to our committee of Family Life consistently listed five major areas of concern: (1) rearing and educating children, (2) family health, (3) family participation at post, (4) difficulties with support services, and (5) finances and family life.

### Children

The conventional saying, "children adapt so easily to new environments overseas" is no longer accepted as truth by Foreign Service families. They have seen, heard about or personally suffered with children who have had real problems.

Too often Foreign Service children have been shoved aside in the name of representational duty. Time for family activities is often in short supply and not considered important by superiors. Departure and arrival times are so full of activity that children's needs can be neglected.

Young children left in the care of unsuitable servants can be victimized by unscrupulous and dangerous individuals. The Werkman Report documents many cases of psychological difficulties that have arisen due to mental and physical abuse of children by household employees.<sup>1</sup>

Grade school children do not have sufficient opportunities to learn about their own country, form lasting friendships with other children, or have the security which comes from a more settled existence. They miss organized group sports programs and the chance to participate in scientific and nature study programs. Many young children today acquire large amounts of technical information in this country that is unavailable elsewhere. Sometimes the constant changes of language and environment precipitate problems of dyslexia and antisocial behavior which will continue to impede their learning and affect their psychological development unless properly diagnosed and treated.

Many parents observed that when children spend most of their formative years abroad they are "superficially at home in all cultures, but not truly a part of any--including their own." Young adults, products of an earlier era of Foreign Service life, still see themselves as permanent observers, never fully participants in their own country.

Teenagers find it difficult to acquire a working knowledge of their own culture. They have little or no knowledge of what things cost, have never had a chance to earn their own money, nor the opportunity to observe careers other than their fathers'. Adolescence is always a time of stress, but young people abroad find it very difficult to deal with their loneliness, instability and boredom. "They have very special problems of identity, involvement and loyalty." In the worst cases, drug and alcohol abuse, criminal actions, mental health problems and even death have been the result--causing terrible anguish to families and the government.

There is at present very little help available overseas to the families involved in these difficult problems. There is no crisis prevention counseling, and many parents fear their careers may be jeopardized if they do seek help. When parents and children are separated

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<sup>1</sup>Sidney L. Werkman, a former lecturer at the Foreign Service Institute and former Senior Psychiatric Consultant to the Peace Corps, did a study on Foreign Service children which was read at the 124th Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in Washington, D.C., May 3-7, 1971.

by excessive representational duties, assignment or boarding school, it is difficult to maintain close communication and deal with unsatisfactory situations before serious problems result.

The quality of education overseas is of prime concern to all Foreign Service families. The office of Overseas Schools does try to insure that Foreign Service children receive comparable educational experience abroad. Their success is gratefully noted at larger posts where it is easier to attract quality teachers, maintain adequate facilities and quickly receive the latest educational materials. "However, at less pleasant and/or more isolated posts, our children often endure very poor, if not perverse, educational experiences."

Inadequacies reported are: lack of libraries and laboratory equipment, antiquated textbooks, limited or inconsistent curriculum, unqualified teachers, inadequate college counseling, and no special attention to learning disabilities and emotional problems. Frequent changes in teachers and administration are common. Furthermore, the unique overseas experiences of Foreign Service children are no longer of use to them within the typical standardized competitive exams for eligibility for admission--let alone scholarships--at university level. It is no exaggeration to say "a child who received his early education at remote posts in LDC's with few educational experiences comparable to the U.S. norm, can be as deprived in some relevant respects as one from the most rural or impoverished ghetto areas in the U.S."

Over the years, employees and wives have served long hours on school boards at isolated posts trying to promote high standards; now they question, along with all Foreign Service parents, whether it is fair to offer their children such an erratic and interrupted educational experience, considering today's competitive job market.

Too often adolescents must cope with correspondence courses at post, attend boarding school in another foreign country, or the student is forced to return alone to the States--sometimes halfway around the world from his parents. The young teenager will only have one round trip per year to settle any worries or problems he may have. "Cutbacks in dependent travel allowances and the failure of educational allowances to keep up with the increased educational costs cause real financial and emotional stress in families. This is when families really begin to question whether the sacrifice is worth it."

Travel allowances for children or divorced parents are another source of serious concern. Rules for these fractured families vary, and in some cases the Foreign Service officer without custody has no opportunity to see his children while working abroad.

The Foreign Service Educational and Counseling Center (FSECC), a private activity funded by AFSA and AAFSW, responds to some of the needs listed above. The Center is a concentrated and ever-expanding source of information on all aspects of education. Mrs. Bernice Munsey, the new director, is eager to work with parents and students here in the U.S. and through correspondence with those abroad. Unfortunately, families overseas who could benefit from FSECC's services are unaware of its existence.

#### Family Participation at Posts

The sense of participation in the U.S. government community abroad is very lacking at some posts. "Recent emphasis on individual freedom has torn down the social supports of the past which helped ensure that all employee families abroad were integrated into the efforts--business as well as social--of the Embassy/Consulate. Nothing has replaced this."

Many letters expressed confusion about Airgram A-278 of January, 1972 and expressed the urgent need to rethink the official policies, official practices at post, and volunteer efforts in the government community that affects us all. A more detailed discussion of this problem is presented in the Modern Foreign Service Wife Study Group Report.

Many people mentioned the need for improvement of welcoming customs over and above the official arrival procedures. The Forum also received numerous suggestions for the creation of a new position, a "family liaison officer" at posts abroad, who could help coordinate community activities, locate community resources and work to maintain or improve post morale. This person could work in close cooperation with the Family Liaison Office (FLO) recommended by the Forum in this report.

Spouses recognize that the burden of most representational duties, the care and feeding of VIP's and boosting of post's morale still falls to the senior wives. Isn't it time the job of Foreign Service wife received compensation?



The 12-year old son of a DCM visiting the Kennedy Center "Town Meeting on the Air" remarked over National Public Radio that his mother worked as hard at representing our country as the wife of the U.S. President and deserved to be paid for her service. He was right.

Financial worries are intensified by the inflation at home that frightens families trying to plan for the purchase of a home, college bills, and retirement. Two incomes have become necessary.

A committee member who entertained frequently abroad without reimbursement expressed bitterness and resentment that no recognition is given to her family for their personal efforts to improve cross-cultural understanding. Today she is uncertain if she will be able to continue her children's education at the graduate level.

### Family Health

Families are also concerned with sacrificing their physical and mental health for the needs of the service. "Facilities for prevention, diagnosis and treatment of endemic diseases at posts located in less-developed countries are usually not adequate to insure the maintenance of family health at a good level. Often the overworked regional doctor has to cover too large an area to provide thorough medical coverage for the number of persons, including dependents, under his jurisdiction."

Forum participants felt that the Medical Division should review with greater care the health record of the total family unit before clearing them for service at a post lacking facilities for their particular problem. For example: direct transfer from one hardship post to another when someone in the family suffers from serious amoebic dysentery, recently had surgery or has a handicap which can't be treated at the ongoing assignment.

In 1962, Bea Russell wrote in LIVING IN STATE that "personnel serving in Africa can expect to lose at least a portion of their health." That was fourteen years ago, yet one wife who recently returned from Africa reports "the incomplete list of our family's health problems included nearly constant dysentery, tapeworm, a child's vaginal infection from a nursemaid's masturbation, concussions and resulting shock, hepatitis, an array of skin infections, head lice, insomnia and dizziness from altitude, and malnourishment due to a lack of safe meat, milk and fresh vegetables. We considered ourselves to be among

the more fortunate as other families fared worse, including death." It must be noted that some families seem to thrive in the most adverse health conditions; however, others suffer many of the above medical problems, plus exotic varieties peculiar to their particular assignment.

The Medical Division recognizes that many illnesses are stress related (psychosomatic) yet there are few facilities at posts abroad for helping individuals and families cope with stress. Lee Dane, in her paper "The Use of the Paraprofessional for Treatment of Americans Abroad"<sup>2</sup> stated, "The expatriate American is unique in his potential for encountering more stressful situations than his stateside counterpart, with less recourse for alleviating stress... The fact that the Foreign Service functions at all allows some room for thought that perhaps there exists a special breed with uncanny talents for social adjustment. Whatever accounts for those who function well, I surmise they represent the extreme end of the bell scale, and wives and children do not necessarily fall into the same category."

A paraprofessional at post, working in conjunction with the Medical Division, might be able to help those patients whose medical problems are stress related, thus easing the doctor's burden and aiding post morale. A family with medical problems has a government employee who isn't working to capacity. Many work hours are lost, and considerable money spent to medically evacuate such people; to say nothing of the personal and family distress involved.

### Support Services

Like the poor, administrative complaints will always be with us. While recognizing that many support services are efficiently and well provided, there does seem to be a real need for better communication of regulations and directives among management, administrative sections at posts, and the people they are designed to serve. Too often the administrative regulations concerning weight allowances, shipment of household effects, housing allowances, transfers, policies toward evacuees are poorly understood, inaccurately interpreted or too rigidly followed by the administrative section at post.

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<sup>2</sup>This paper was published in excerpted form in the Department of State Newsletter, June 1974 under the title "Psychological Realities for Americans Abroad."

Concerning household effects, furnished posts usually contain the basic family needs; however, the limited shipment allowance "hardly permits bringing any quantity of books, records and hobby equipment the experts advise you to bring." If the parents know in advance that Christmas and birthday toys and gifts will be impossible to buy at post, they use a portion of their limited weight allowance for such purchases. In fact, if the advice in some post reports were followed, most of the shipment allowance would go for anticipated needs, leaving little room for the family's favorite possessions which help make government quarters home.

The housing standards vary widely from country to country. What would be considered substandard in one country becomes more than adequate in another. "Coming from a post with furnished housing, the inequality of this situation is unrealistic. Every family either spends a lot of savings or goes into debt just to move in. Financial burdens create stress, poor housing creates stress, being unsettled creates stress--with the whole family in a state of threatened mental health, it is impossible for the officer to be effective in his work."

Transfers are a trying time for the Foreign Service family due to culture shock; they are acerbated--and many work hours are lost--trying to locate the family's household effects which may have never left the previous post, were sent to the wrong post, badly damaged in transit, or finally arrived, but were incorrectly billed excess weight charges.

Administrative personnel need sensitivity training to deal with these stresses and the truly traumatic stress of evacuation due to acts of terrorism, war, revolution or medical emergencies. An influx of evacuees causes a work overload at the embassy/consulate safehaven, yet the evacuees have real emotional, financial, medical and logistical needs which must be met. Though personnel at safe haven posts usually rally to help the evacuees, their enthusiasm may be strained if the crises are continual.

Support services should ideally help the employee and his family settle into post as quickly as possible. This insures that overseas employees will do more effective work faster, and their families will have the opportunity to contribute to the sense of community at post in a positive way.

### Finances and Family Life

The financial burdens of Foreign Service life are closely related to the discontent of many spouses and have a direct impact on family life. Some spouses might merely like to find employment commensurate with their training and capacity. Others are obliged to leave children of various ages (when they would prefer not to do so) to find employment for the main purpose of making ends meet.

For the Foreign Service family, Washington, D.C., is an economic hardship post. In many cases, returning home means taking what amounts to as much as a 30% cut in salary, and the Foreign Service family often has to spend what it was able to save overseas to make ends meet in Washington. The cost of living in the area is high, with the cost of housing having risen the most drastically. However, the main concern of many families is to save enough to ensure their children's post-secondary school education (not to mention private secondary school, should that be necessary). With the current low salary scale, such saving is extremely difficult if not impossible.

In addition, the Foreign Service family has unusual expenses such as paying for transit insurance, temporary lodging, representation at posts and for the expenses of home leave. Transit insurance, though absolutely necessary, is never reimbursed and temporary lodging and representational expenses are often only partially reimbursed. Home leave can result in a particularly objectionable form of financial hardship; home leave is obligatory, but many necessary expenses--such as lodging and transportation--are only partially reimbursed. Thus, unless one can borrow a friend's house and car, home leave often results in financial hardship.

It is true that some of these expenses can be included in making income tax calculations. However, since they are considered as tax adjustments and deductions and not as tax credits, the Foreign Service family ultimately loses money in the service of the United States Government.

Furthermore, the rhythm of expenditure of funds can be very erratic. A Foreign Service family going off to a hardship post may suddenly find itself faced with purchasing \$1500 worth of staples and other supplies because the local market is unreliable or non-existent.

Finally, as for automobiles, with one limited exception, the Government will not ship foreign-made cars for the Foreign Service family. It is often more expensive and difficult to maintain an American car overseas than it is to maintain a foreign car in Washington. However, since the cost of shipping a foreign car is prohibitive for most families, they bring an American car with them and are faced with the high cost and frustration of maintenance overseas.

Because of these unusual financial demands, the Foreign Service is in great danger of returning to the past, when only people of independent means could afford to serve their country overseas. The pay scale and reimbursements are not commensurate with the demands placed upon the Foreign Service family, nor for that matter with the education, expertise and dedication of most Foreign Service officers. As for the Foreign Service spouse, it is difficult to find employment because of the transient nature of Foreign Service life. Much bitterness and frustration could be alleviated if working could be made a matter of choice for the spouse rather than of necessity.

The Modern Foreign Service Wife Study Group Report

The changes in the roles and expectations of the American woman, and hence the Foreign Service wife, is what one scholar has called "One of the most significant social and economic facts of our time." The significance of this change for the institutions of the country is just beginning to be felt and the long range consequences are still unknown. The extent to which institutions deal constructively with these changes is the extent to which they will succeed.

The Foreign affairs agencies recognized these changes in the Directive issued in January, 1972. The regulation says specifically:

"Women have gained increasing recognition of their right to be treated as individuals and to have personal and career interests in addition to their more traditional roles as wife or mother. If the Foreign Service is to remain representative of American Society, and if its traditions are to be preserved and strengthened, the Foreign Service must adapt to these changing conditions."

After emphasizing that "It is not intended to undermine the sense of cooperation, participation and community spirit abroad..." the regulation says, "the wife of a Foreign Service employee who has accompanied her husband to a foreign post is a private individual."

In the eyes of a few people, the policy followed since 1972 might be described in the words of one young woman, as "salutory neglect" and therefore desirable. This woman, who had never been overseas as a Foreign Service wife, explained her attitude in the following way.

"The phrase 'salutory neglect' best describes the treatment I would like from the State Department. I would like to pursue my career at foreign posts basically as I do here, without the concern of the State Department. I cannot perceive of any conflict of interest between my work, technical editing, and that of my husband."

She appears to believe that she will be able to act as if she were in her own country. But as many have testified, this is clearly not the case and one of the major reasons

why the majority of spouses feel it is time to reevaluate the results of the Directive and deal more realistically with the changes as they are affected by the constraints of Foreign Service life.

The 1972 Directive was a laudable first step...but with time the complexity of the situation became apparent. In the last five years the Foreign Service has witnessed the breaking down of the traditional and often unequal structures and conventions of diplomatic life, allowing for more individual choice. But, although the directive did wipe away the inequities of the past, it had the unintended and unfortunate effect of destroying, in many posts, the positive aspects of the Foreign Service community. The old structure, as one woman wrote,

"created a sense of community and esprit de corps, (it) gave continuity to women's lives, (an Embassy tea is an Embassy tea in Paris or Ouagadougou, only the trimmings differ) and provided some kind of a standard for and a sense of personal worth."

The Forum received many letters commenting on the growing isolation of the women from each other, and how "fragmented the Embassy community is." A particularly articulate spouse discussed the problem in these terms.

"It is a pity that we FS wives have lost our sense of community, yet it is our own fault. We mistrust the motives of the senior wives despite their caring for us and being enormous resources of information. We feel co-erced when it is our imagination or else we are on the defensive. We feel isolated when older wives do not seem to feel the impact of the women's movement. We feel pressured by those who sublimate their own roles to their husband's and then we fall into the same trap. We do not give ourselves or other women enough credit. Here we are trying to find ways to focus on problems despite rank, to inform ourselves, and to co-operate with each other."

Another wrote, "A helping hand offered to anyone, regardless of husband's rank, does not infringe upon anyone's 'rights' to remain private." Unfortunately, what in other circumstances would be considered neighborliness, is interpreted as pressure to conform.

It would be inaccurate to report that all the women feel this way. Community spirit has not uniformly dissolved. For example, one woman described her community as "much more interesting" now. She continued,

"Most women have their own interests these days even if they cannot work. They will explore things and, as a result, there is more real exchange. But fluency in the language is the key."

These women were in the minority, however, and enough evidence was presented to the Forum to suggest that, in many places, the community is in serious trouble.

It is now time to put something in the place of the old structures. The new structures must contribute to a new sense of community within the Foreign Service, a community based on shared talents, strength, experiences and concerns, but one which is also democratic in spirit and respectful of individual differences.

To achieve this, the study group on the Modern Foreign Service Wife believes that the foreign affairs agencies and the spouses jointly must address three major problems which were identified as inherent in Foreign Service life:

1. The peculiar relationship between the foreign affairs agencies and the spouses.
2. The lack of employment and career opportunities for spouses.
3. The inequities of implicit representational responsibilities of spouses.

#### The Nature of the Peculiar Relationship

Since the 1972 Directive, the relationship between the foreign affairs agencies and the spouses has been based on a denial of mutual obligations and responsibilities.

Theoretically, during the last five years spouses of Foreign Service employees have been free to seek employment, follow their own careers, and entertain if and when they wished. The phrase, "Two for the price of one" was considered not just obsolete, but dead. The wife was a "private person" not a "government employee."



In practice, "The Emancipation Proclamation does not work," declared one woman. Many women expressed very strongly that the wife is "still an unpaid and unappreciated employee of the Department of State." For, despite the regulations and the fact that in the United States women are more independent, socially, and economically, the Foreign Service spouse is involved, through marriage, with an institution and way of life that imposes limitations on that independence overseas. Legal restrictions, cultural constraints and diplomatic traditions very often continue to place her in a dependent position. The result is that it is now practically impossible for many women married to Foreign Service employees to reconcile the conflict between the demands of American life (that of being independent) with the demands of Foreign Service life (that of being dependent).

The women who sought to be regarded as individuals, independent of their husband's positions, found that the Directive had the effect of making them non-persons. They became private persons in theory without the means to act as such in private. Those who valued the traditional role of the Foreign Service wife have been left feeling, as one wife put it:

"Only a great emptiness (bordering on the feeling of having been a sucker all these years), a sense of frustration, of a lack of fulfillment and recognition."

Others found that the conflict between the changes in the roles and the constraints imposed by Foreign Service life caused them to question whether Foreign Service life is worth the personal and family sacrifice it demands. As one woman put it,

"I am simply forced to ask myself, 'Am I stupid or cruel, or both, to do this to myself and to my children? And if this is the case, what about my husband?'"

Not all ask the question as dramatically, as negatively or as undiplomatically as this woman, but the findings of the Study Group on the Modern Foreign Service Wife seem to indicate that a large group of women are questioning the wisdom of continuing to be "of the Foreign Service if we are not in the Foreign Service."

The options for dealing with the contradictions and limitations that diplomatic life imposes on their personal lives are few. One can revert to the 19th century and accept them; one can divorce one's husband/wife, or get one's husband/wife to divorce the Foreign Service. Or, one can try to change Foreign Service family life. Increasingly the Foreign Service is experiencing more cases of divorce, wives leaving posts shortly after arrival and requests for longer tours of duty in Washington, D.C. Figures are not available to document the number of resignations because of the problems, although a few people spoke of a rising resignation rate in the course of the Forum project. Most of the people who wrote to the Forum and who participated in the meetings in Washington were overwhelmingly in favor of the last alternative, improving Foreign Service life.

For this to be accomplished, the Forum has recommended that unless a service of bachelors is the long-range goal (suggestion submitted by one woman), a new relationship between the Department and families must be evolved. This relationship must be based on mutual respect with a clear understanding that each has specific needs that must be fulfilled and, by the same token, that each has specific responsibilities which must be accepted.

Spouses would like to be recognized as a very diverse group of individuals who are capable of and desirous of contributing to the U.S. interests abroad in a variety of ways. Some would like to continue the role of the traditional Foreign Service wife, in the best sense of the phrase. Some are primarily concerned about their own career and do not want to be involved in any way with the Foreign Service. Others would like to combine their own family and career needs with the Foreign Service, and still others view homemaking and mothering as a full time job with little time left over for other activities until later.

Spouses, on the other hand, must recognize the representative (not representational) nature of their life overseas, regardless of whether they are paid employees of the foreign affairs agencies. Other people, host country nationals, third country nationals, including other diplomatic, and even other Americans, continue to regard the Foreign Service spouses as official Americans. Her activities are not seen as "private actions" but more likely as extensions of the Embassy. As one person wrote, "Whether they like it or

not, whether they seek such status or not, all wives are representatives of the Embassy as well as of themselves and their country." The Forum believes that the establishment of a new relationship in a climate of mutual understanding and cooperation is central. Without this the other recommendations cannot be discussed.

In order to foster a new and more productive relationship between the agencies and families, the Forum believes that the Family Liaison Office (FLO) <sup>should</sup> be the institutional means that would facilitate direct and regular communication between the agencies and family members.

#### Limited Gainful Employment and Career Opportunities for Spouses

The modern Foreign Service wife is representative of American women in general when it comes to the question of gainful employment. According to the New York Times of September 12, 1976, 48% of American women over sixteen are gainfully employed. Roughly two-thirds of these women are employed because they have to be. Many are the sole support of their children. Others are doing their part to help maintain the family income and budget in the face of inflation, which the Bureau of Labor says has reduced purchasing power by one-third in the last six years. Those who are lucky enough to work seek the same sense of self-actualization and satisfaction in developing their potential that men have long pursued.

If the Foreign Service wife ever was a "Lady Bountiful" with time on her hands and money to spare, she is no longer. Today she admits her own needs and seeks her identity in her own interests and life's work, not in those of her husband. A sentiment expressed by many is contained in the following comment made by one woman: "I do not think I could ever sublimate my own ambitions entirely to my husband's work."

The modern Foreign Service wife is also acutely aware of the negative effect that inflation and increasingly limited resources at home and abroad have and will have on her economic future and that of her family. Foreign Service salaries have never made a family rich, but today without a second income, they may well leave a family poor. As one young wife wrote in dismay,

"Certainly no one can expect a family to survive on the salary of a Junior officer (the average of which is 28-30), or have aspirations of owning their own home."

Recently the Research Committee on Spouses surveyed Foreign Service Officers, Foreign Service Information Officers, and Foreign Service Reserve Officers living in Washington and found that 47.4% of the spouses (almost all female) of these officers are gainfully employed. The Spouses' Skills/Talent Bank has received over 900 completed forms from spouses who are gainfully employed or who are seeking employment. In 1974, the Institute sent a questionnaire to all diplomatic posts in which information on working wives was requested. As of February 1977, 117 posts out of 252 had responded to the survey, reporting that over 560 women held paying jobs. (The kinds of employment range from those within the Embassy to jobs with local enterprises, jobs with U.S. or other third country businesses, to self-generated employment. They are listed on Appendix A.)

Although the data from the survey in Washington, the information from the Skills Bank, and the FSI questionnaires indicate that many Foreign Service wives already are employed, more and more wives would like to work if the opportunities were available. The need for gainful employment and meaningful career opportunities was considered the issue by the Study Group on Modern Foreign Service Wives, a group which has participants from a cross-section of the Foreign Service community. The members ranged from the wife of a Career Minister to the wife of an FSO-7. In the letters received from overseas missions, employment was mentioned time and time again as one of the most important issues the Forum should address.

That the Foreign Service must try to help facilitate this desire if it wants to be able to recruit highly educated married officers seemed obvious to many of the participants in the Forum project. Both the Study Group members and the people who wrote from abroad felt that it is in the interest of the Foreign Service to assist in innovations which might create more opportunities for spouses to seek gainful employment overseas, and many suggestions were offered in several areas in which participants believe efforts would be strengthened.

Spouses' employment needs should be considered and dealt with equitably, meaning that qualified spouses wish to be regarded and judged first as professionals in their own right and secondly as wives. At the same time, the Study Group recognize that the Department cannot respond to the employment issue in a way that would prejudice the professional standards and concerns of its career employees.

### Constraints on Employment

The FSI survey highlighted the major legal constraint operating against the Foreign Service spouse who seeks employment on the local economy: the need for a work permit and the difficulties involved in obtaining one. Said one woman who had tried unsuccessfully to get one,

"They are difficult to obtain. This forces wives either to free-lance or to work underground. It also absolves posts of any obligation to aid working spouses."

The requirements are different for every post. In fact, the only pattern reflected in the answers to this part of the survey is that no generalizations can be made about work permits. In some countries the wife would have to forfeit diplomatic immunity in return for the permit; nevertheless, an option some wives would like to have. Other countries will only give permits to people who have very specialized skill, and the high rate of unemployment in other countries makes it nearly impossible for any foreigner to be given a permit.

Part of the difficulty in finding a job overseas stems from the lack of detailed information about what spouses can realistically expect to happen to their lives when they marry into the Foreign Service. Many feel the Department has the responsibility to inform spouses adequately and accurately before the employee is hired; many feel it is equally important to have detailed information, prior to arrival, about employment opportunities at the different posts. While this may not be possible for every post, region specific information can be provided.

Existing regulations could be more strongly implemented and publicized. One regulation (76 State 168096) directs the administrative officers to provide more complete job opportunity information in the post report. Yet many spouses, particularly those about to go overseas, complained that post reports continue to give inadequate information. Even if the information were complete, reports are almost always two years out of date. One person suggested that the Foreign Service Institute explore ways of using information systems which take advantage of sophisticated technology and on the spot people to update the information on a given country much more frequently.

Another regulation (76 State 127433) that few spouses seem to be aware of authorizes the certification of their volunteer efforts abroad. This can then be used on a resume as valid work experience, reducing the problem of frequent breaks in a spouse's employment history.

Assuming that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, many women suggested that the foreign affairs agencies expand and fully fund the workshop on career planning and money management, which many indicated were extremely valuable. These kinds of courses help spouses manage their own career goals. Also, by actively welcoming spouses to the employee's career counseling sessions, the agencies could convey that they recognize the importance of the spouses's career interests. They would also begin to provide the information that is so vital in planning for the future.

Foreign Service Reserve appointments offer professional employment opportunities. However, some spouses expressed frustration because while they knew these jobs were available, they found no information or office which could explain the skills needed to apply.

Although lack of information continues to be one of the most fundamental obstacles spouses face in pursuing employment, there were other areas that the spouses wrote about.

Several women complained, for example, that the anti-nepotism policies, as interpreted by personnel people have the unfair and illegal result of denying equal opportunity to one sex over the other because the majority of Foreign

Service spouses are women. Currently, anti-nepotism means that many women married to Foreign Service employees are ineligible for Fulbright-Hays Scholarships and professorships. Other grants, contracts and jobs are consistently denied to women married to Foreign Service employees.

Many individuals wrote about one solution now open to spouses, that of becoming an employee of one of the foreign affairs agencies and serving as a working couple. They cautioned the Forum and the agencies about relying on this one approach as a cure-all for the wife who is looking for employment. Just as all spouses cannot be expected to be artists and writers, professions often cited as "perfect" for such a mobile life, neither are all wives desirous of or qualified for employment with the foreign affairs agencies.

The list of specific suggestions is lengthy. "Hire wives to be the social secretary for the Ambassador," or to "write the post reports." Consider "shared work, where two dependents share the work week in the same job." Let wives do research on "socio/anthropological subjects," and hire them "locally through purchase orders." Train wives in "English language teaching, but give it a professional status, by paying better salaries." Let them do the "work now done by managment firms and outside consultants." Provide "counselling about what one can do professionally or to add to one's experience and personal growth." And perhaps providing "examples of what other individuals are doing" would be constructive. In short, the spouses would like to see "the scope of career options widened," be it "through hiring and training in the field," by "reserving a working quota for foreign spouses in Embassies," by "giving them priority over third country nationals," "expanding PIT programs where possible," or "establishing a wife corps." But they do not want jobs to be only "at the lowest grade level." One spouse spoke pointedly about the practice at many posts where,

"Posts take advantage of eager, qualified spouses' willingness to work and insist that they take the lowest salary - despite the Department's savings in transportation, housing and all. Further, working at a lower salary is a black mark on your resume later."

No one of the above suggestions is the answer, but they all speak to the need for "an institutional approach

to breaking down the barriers," as one woman pointed out: "eliminating the bureaucratic obstacle would assist us greatly," she added.

The Forum's recommendation #7 speaks to the need of expanding employment opportunities for spouses. Specifically, the Forum recommends that the foreign affairs agencies recognize the diverse talent of the spouse and work to integrate them into the post communities abroad, that a catalog of contract positions be maintained, and that the existing regulations regarding the hiring of spouses abroad be reinforced and implemented.

#### Inherent and Implicit Representational Responsibilities

The modern Foreign Service wife is unhappy about representation. The 1972 Directive theoretically exempted her from representational responsibilities, but in practice, especially at the senior level, it is she, not her husband, who bears the brunt of the work involved in the mission's representational duties. She contributes a great deal of time and effort, innumerable unrecognized skills and considerable amounts of money, and yet she gets nothing in return, frequently "not even a thank you," according to many women who wrote on this subject. Many said essentially,

"If entertaining is so important in foreign relations, the person entertaining should be reimbursed for expenses and time for preparation. The wife...should not feel she is doing all the work for nothing."  
"It's just not fair."

There appear to be two different definitions and approaches to representation. In the best sense of the word, representation refers to a wide variety of mutually satisfying and beneficial ways Americans can come to know the citizens and officials of a host country and thereby convey to them a better and truer understanding of the people, government, and culture of the United States. This can be done through community and family activities, friendships formed at school, at work, through one's children, or in a hundred other ways. There are few spouses who do not agree that "representation" in this sense of the word is an important and valid activity.

However, when representation becomes a synonym for the social staples of diplomatic life--cocktail parties, massive receptions, large buffets--many women question its validity. This quote expresses the feelings of many.



"After attending innumerable coffees, receptions and dinners, any intelligent person can only conclude that most of the resources, human and monetary, are wasted in such events,"..."Foreign Service business is not normally aided by these affairs."..."Suddenly it's the superficiality of the existence that's disturbing."

The Modern Foreign Service Wife Study Group has chosen to call this kind of representation, diplomatic entertaining. The opinion of most of the women is that (1) it does not represent the best of American life and values and (2) it is more costly in terms of time and money taken away from already strained family schedules and budgets than it is worth. This is especially true when the people who do all the work, the wives, receive no compensation--psychic or financial--for their efforts.

Foreign Service wives have reacted to implicit responsibilities for diplomatic entertaining in two ways. Many women feel that they are foolish to continue to knock themselves out and shortchange themselves and their families by accepting these responsibilities and so they have simply refused to play the diplomatic entertaining game. Others accept these implicit responsibilities, carry them off with less help and less money than before and, needless to say, feel resentful of those who in their words "do nothing." This division among wives has contributed in large part to the breakdown of the sense of community and spontaneous neighborliness which reportedly characterized Foreign Service life overseas in the past.

In order to represent the best of the United States to host country nationals, treat Foreign Service spouses more equitably and thereby encourage the restoration of a sense of community among Foreign Service families overseas, the Forum has recommended that the agencies review and clarify representational responsibilities and explore ways to compensate spouses for their work and expenses.

#### Cultural Constraints

American diplomatic women are not the only one's examining and challenging the professional, economic, and social impact of the Foreign Service on their personal lives.

In December 1975, the Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers in Canada established a "committee that would study the professional, financial, and related implications for Foreign Service Officer spouses of the Foreign Service life." The study done by this committee raised similar issues of concern: wider employment opportunities for spouses' participation in "official hospitality," more frequent annual leave, improved housing conditions abroad, and longer home leave." In West Germany, Foreign Service wives are organizing to bring about changes in the thirteen-year old "Women and Family Service (FFD). The General-Anseiger of December 24, 1976<sup>10-11-76</sup> "the final goal of the Foreign Service wives... (is) "that they are given permission to look for a job, within the limits of their possibilities, while they are abroad, or that their cooperation with their husband in foreign posts is adequately honored by the Foreign Office." Among other things the wives are asking for are "shorter tours of duty in hardship posts, early information about imminent transfers, continued payment of contributions to old-age insurance for wives who have to stop working because they accompany their husbands to a foreign post, temporary suspension for female civil servants, assistance in finding a job to returning Foreign Service wives, and permission to both spouses to work in the same embassy."

A very significant movement among diplomatic wives is taking place in New York. On February 28, 1977 an Ad Hoc committee of diplomatic wives, sponsored a general symposium "The Role of The Diplomatic Wife--Its Future and Potential." About 150 diplomatic wives from different countries discussed the findings of four discussion groups which focused on (1) the Role of the Diplomatic Wife, (2) Personal Adaptation, (3) Current Diplomatic Wives Associations and, (4) Positive Aspects and Suggestions. The goal of the symposium was "to exchange ideas and experiences, to consider common aims and specific situations, and to improve communication and information among diplomatic wives all over the world." Again the issues raised were familiar ones: clarification and definition of the wife's role, the problems diplomatic life poses for the family, education for children, economic inequities, employment and career opportunities for diplomatic wives, adequate information, improved communication between diplomatic wives and their governments.

The cultural constraints imposed by the traditions of the diplomatic life-style are being questioned by women in many nations. The Study Group on the Modern Foreign Service Wife was particularly concerned with the need to shed the traditions which are no longer useful. In the process a new image of the American diplomatic spouse would be promoted reflecting the diversity and competence of these women in a large number of fields. This alone would contribute significantly to helping the foreign affairs agencies "remain representative of American society."

## APPENDIX A

Jobs held by Foreign Service Wives Overseas,  
as compiled by the FSI Survey, 1974-1977

Embassy Jobs

Nurse  
Secretary--usually substitute, but sometimes permanent  
Arabic translator  
Commissary manager  
Property inventory taker  
Research assistant  
Consular officer--when the regular officer is on leave,  
or hasn't arrived yet  
Visa officer--when the load is particularly heavy or  
someone is on leave  
USIS English Language Director  
Teletype operator  
Managing the home of Ambassador accredited to one or more  
posts when his house is empty between visits  
Budget and Fiscal work  
Commissary, other work than managing  
Proctor for Fulbright exams  
Teaching English at Bi-national Centers

Jobs with Local Enterprise

Food columnist and cooking teacher  
Advertising agency  
Model  
TV Commentator  
Editor/writer  
Magazine editor  
Editing in a law office  
Free-lance illustrating  
Conversational English teaching at a local junior college  
Economic research  
Nurse at a local hospital  
Lab assistant at an Agronomic Institute which is part of  
the faculty of agriculture at a local university  
Tutoring executives in English at local business firms

Editing business related English language publications for  
     local firm  
 Teaching at local universities and schools  
 Editing job at a bank  
 Airline hostess  
 Secretary for local businesses  
 Librarian at a local school  
 Interior decorator with local shop  
 Student counseling at local university  
 Free-lance photographer  
 Boutique owner  
 Cost estimator for an international moving company  
 Teacher/librarian at an Institute of Modern Languages  
 Social Worker  
 Teacher at a local parochial school  
 Illustrator  
 Purchaser of locally published books for U.S. universities  
 Beautician

Jobs with U.S. or Other Foreign (third country) Business

Public relations and personnel for a U.S. banking corporation  
 Secretaries at foreign embassies  
 Secretaries with U.S. businesses  
 Teaching in British or other third country schools  
 Translator for the UN  
 American University Alumnae Association

Jobs Held by Foreign Service Wives Overseas

Run motor pool at international school  
 Teaching at the American school  
 Manager of American Community Club  
 Managing the Fulbright Study program  
 Manager of the Recreation Association Club

Self-Generated Jobs

Piano lessons  
 Violin lessons  
 Art lessons  
 Organizer of a nursery school  
 Ceramic artist  
 Tutoring

### The Spouses' Skills/Talent Bank Report

The creation of a centralized skills/talent bank for the spouses of Foreign Service personnel is not a new idea, but one that was suggested by many individuals prior to 1976.

The Medical Division in the State Department recommended that the Department establish a skills bank to locate qualified medical personnel overseas who could provide emergency medical services to Foreign Service personnel. In fact, the concept of a skills bank was submitted as an employee suggestion in 1972.

As early as 1971 the Department began issuing policy statements and regulations to encourage and facilitate the overseas employment of spouses. In 1972, another directive (3FAM121.3-3) requested posts to establish local skills inventories of dependents, while another (3FAM122.5-1), stated that differential posts were encouraged to employ qualified Foreign Service dependents to limit the number of U.S. citizens required at post. Nevertheless, the policy directives and regulations were not uniformly implemented. Most posts did not set up the required inventory nor hire more spouses. The decentralized efforts to encourage the hiring of spouses were not working.

In 1975, the Research Committee on Spouses, an ad hoc study group of the Women's Action Organization (WAO) was created to concentrate on expanding employment opportunities for spouses. This committee, aware that increasing numbers of spouses wanted to be gainfully employed overseas and that they continued to express frustration over the difficulties of finding such employment, reached a consensus very early that a centralized skills/talent inventory was needed. Several factors influenced this decision. The majority of organizations which hire professionals to work abroad, including the foreign affairs agencies, other U.S. Government agencies, the International Organizations and American corporations, do so through centralized, U.S.-based personnel systems. The Committee felt that a centralized skills bank located in Washington, D.C. would serve the needs of the individuals and organizations better than several, scattered in various places.

The Committee also believed that the U.S. Government would realize substantial savings as a result of a centralized file. The specialized talent of spouses already stationed abroad at government expense could be contracted at post or from a neighboring mission, rather than being sent out from Washington, as is the present practice. It was felt that this more efficient system would go a long way towards improving the morale of the Foreign Service community, seriously affected by the current waste of talent. The prospect of an overseas assignment would seem less constraining for the spouse who wished to continue her/his career and would decrease the number of officers who, for this reason, are choosing to spend longer tours in Washington.

Consequently, in December, 1975, with the support of the WAO, the Committee developed a proposal to create a centralized Skills/Talent Bank in Washington. The proposal was discussed with several high-ranking officials in the three foreign affairs agencies, including the Director General of the Foreign Service in a meeting Committee members had with her on February 5, 1976. Specifically the Research Committee requested \$3900 (or approximately 50¢ per spouse) to fund the project.

In these discussions it became apparent that there was a general lack of information about the concerns of spouses. Responses to the need for an inventory of spouses' skills varied from "Wives don't want to work," to "If they do, they certainly aren't qualified in any areas the Foreign Service could use." It became even more important, then, to be able to document the actual skills of the spouses, and their attitudes towards gainful employment.

Committee members continued to meet for the next four months with a designated Department liaison person, with the hope that the Department would undertake, or at least finance, the project. In May, 1976, after receiving no response from the Department about the inventory, the Committee decided that if the project were to become a reality, they should proceed immediately with the mailing of a questionnaire in order to reach everyone before the summer reassignments cycle.

The questionnaire, designed in consultation with the Department and other government and private personnel specialists and information systems analysts, became the base of a data bank system which would facilitate easy organization,

tabulation and retrieval of vast quantities of information, either manually or electronically. Individuals were asked to list their occupational speciality or specialities, educational qualifications, foreign language skills, employment history and current employment status. The individuals were also asked to indicate their interest in full-time, part-time, or volunteer work. This information would allow the Project Director to match individuals who wanted employment with organizations looking for help. Each person was asked to contribute a fee of three dollars to cover mailing costs and other expenses.

In July, 1976, the questionnaire was mailed to 4672 spouses of Department of State employees. In November and December, 1976, 1589 USIA spouses and 2040 AID spouses received the questionnaire, making a total of 8301 questionnaires mailed. In addition, the project was widely publicized through various magazines and newsletters so that any individuals who were missed could participate.

The initial purpose of the project was to identify and locate the available professional and technical expertise of spouses and to encourage the utilization of these skills by government and private organizations. In the final analysis, however, the Skills/Talent Bank has become much more. To date the Bank has received over 900 questionnaires and an additional 400 comments and letters documenting the enormous wealth and variety of talent. But the letters and questionnaires have identified many problems created by the unique demands of Foreign Service life, especially the difficulties of maintaining a career while overseas. Also, the Skills Bank became for many spouses (and even employees) the only channel of communication with the foreign affairs agencies.

Almost half of the respondents have an advanced degree, and 10% of the total either have or expect to complete doctoral degrees this year. In the medical field alone the Bank has located: 27 Registered Nurses, many with specializations and most unemployed; a Pediatrician, a General Practitioner with twenty years of experience, both unemployed; three Nutritionists; three experienced Clinical Psychologists; and 18 individuals with Master Degrees in Social Work and counseling experience.

The Skills/Talent Bank has also identified spouse expertise available overseas to perform work which has previously been contracted from the U.S., such as architects,



computer specialists, economists, political analysts, and interior designers. There are also lawyers, teachers, school administrators, special education teachers, urban planners, engineers, artists, writers, and business managers. While many of these specialties do not represent the duties of most posts, many do apply to some support service contracted from the United States, or to work performed by local employees, or to services which are needed, but are not provided at all, such as pre-crisis counseling at post. The Bank has also identified a variety of technical skills, such as many unemployed secretaries and even a mechanic in an underdeveloped country whose talent could be used to train local employees.

The individuals who wrote to the Projects Director made it very clear that these skills are not being used. One employee, an FSO-4, described this reaction to the problem:

"I am resigning because my wife cannot pursue her own career. I am disappointed that the Department is not taking effective measures to deal with this situation which is a growing personnel problem."

While others had not yet decided to resign, the specific examples they provided of qualified spouses who were overlooked at the time a job needed to be done, described the same feeling of frustration. For instance, in a Central American country a seven million dollar loan for a nutrition program was approved without consulting with a nutrition specialist, although a spouse at the post was trained in and had experience in nutrition.

In another South American post, a linguist was contracted from Washington at great expense when there was an equally qualified spouse at post. And in a West African post, a person was hired on contract from the United States to conduct an economic-commercial survey when there was a better qualified spouse available who not only was fluent in French but who knew the economic leaders of the country. Had the Skills Bank been in operation, these examples might not have happened.

In many instances, the source of frustration was due to unrealistic expectations because the individuals had received incorrect information. As one person commented,

"It's incredible that so many people in personnel can go around making statements like, 'Of course

you will get a job at post,' without having any idea of what the rules and regulations are."

Others referred to the problems created by lack of access to training courses, particularly the Foreign Service Institute's language programs. The inability to speak the language was one of the most serious handicaps to finding employment mentioned by many people.

The Foreign Service is more than just a job for an individual. It is a way of life which affects the entire family and as such presents unique problems to the spouse who hopes to continue working while abroad. First, normal academic preparation for a career is not sufficient in itself to provide an individual with the scope and flexibility needed to create a position anywhere in the world. Secondly, the mobility of Foreign Service life prevents one from establishing continuity and seniority in a field, even if positions are found. Consequently the employment pattern of most spouses is more likely to show a series of unrelated jobs than career development. This mobility can totally disrupt the career of those with highly specialized skills. This is brought out in the following comment:

"Bravo for the Skills Bank if it can in any way help those of us who have lost touch with our own careers."

Unanticipated re-entry problems were discussed by many people who underlined the need for continual career counseling for spouses. For instance, a teacher who had been overseas for several years found the U.S. job market in education completely changed when she returned. Not only were the old avenues closed to her, but the new possibilities which exist for those who have had the opportunity to retrain themselves were also closed. Another said:

"I know that I will have great difficulty in locating any interesting position when I return to Washington. The trouble with all my previous experience is that there is no piece of paper giving me instant placement at a certain ability level. I have taught, but I have no certificate. I have worked as a secretary, but I have no Civil Service rating."

Those who volunteer their time overseas face problems too, when they attempt to convince employers that the skills acquired and developed in the years of volunteer work are valid experience for gainful employment. While the Civil Service Commission, as well as most private employers, do recognize this kind of experience, the prospective employee must be able to explain the experience in terms people outside the Foreign Service can understand.

An unanticipated, but perhaps the most important, service the Skills/Talent Bank has performed until now is to provide a responsive two-way channel of communication for spouses and even employees with the Department, where there apparently was none before. The majority of the 400 letters received described specific problems encountered and requested information on Department policies, regulations and practices. In another case, the wife of a Junior Officer wrote, saying:

"--My husband just joined the Foreign Service. I expect to finish my MA degree this June and want to know what my career opportunities will be. You are the only person I know to contact."

The Skills Bank has also received 27 letters from working couples describing problems caused by a lack of coordination and responsive communication with the agencies. Many felt that they could not get the help they needed from their employers.

The Skills/Talent Bank was a pilot project but already four bureaus within the State Department and an office in USIA are using the files to locate qualified individuals. In addition, the Project Director has received requests for information and copies of the questionnaire from the Canadian Office of External Affairs, the German and Norwegian Embassies, and the spouse organizations of the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations.

The responses from the individuals the Project was designed to serve have been equally enthusiastic, as in the case of a Career Minister, who wrote,

"--With thanks in advance and much luck on what you're doing--something I wish had been undertaken years ago, but something I'm glad, in any case, to see underway."

A few were extremely pessimistic about the end result.

"-- While I encourage your efforts and believe that such a 'bank' could be extremely useful, I confess that I am very pessimistic with regard to the utilization of the talent of Foreign Service wives because of the seemingly total disregard of the problem on the part of the Department."

The vast majority expressed the hope that the volunteer efforts of the Project Director and members of the Research Committee, who devoted an untold number of hours to the monumental tasks of organization, tabulation of the information received, publicity and referral and counseling services, would not be in vain. As reflected in the comment of a spouse with a PhD in economics, they stressed the importance of making the Skills/Talent Bank a permanent part of the Department.

"--I am delighted to see the Skills/Talent Bank, although a little disappointed to find that this enterprise has to involve so much dedicated volunteer work. One would have thought that the Service could recognize its own interest, both in making it easier for Foreign Service families that wish to maintain two careers to do so, and in making use of the large and growing fund of talent which could so much improve the effectiveness of the U.S. representational effort."

The Forum believes that the most appropriate place for the Skills Bank is in the Family Liaison Office and has recommended that a coordinator of the Skills/Talent Bank be part of the staff of FLO.

## Orientation and Training Study Group Report

Effective orientation and training programs are essential for spouses as well as employees. Foreign Service spouses are partners in family decision-making and are often solely responsible for helping the family through a smooth transition and adjustment to life abroad. The family's ability to adapt successfully to life in foreign countries has a direct effect on the employee's performance and post morale.

### Orientation

Women involved in the Forum project defined "orientation" to include far more than the quality and availability of post reports. They viewed it as a continuous process, beginning at the time the family is considering a career in the Foreign Service and renewed at each successive period of transition.

Many wives do not know enough about Foreign Service life before their husbands enter the Service. The woman of today is a partner in making decisions that affect her family's welfare, but to make wise decisions, she must have accurate information about a career in the Foreign Service so that she and her husband together can weigh the advantages and disadvantages of Foreign Service life for them. Basic information about the obligations and options of Foreign Service spouses would help prepare women for the demands of diplomatic life.

Several women at the Forum's Open Meeting in November brought up this point, and the group agreed that unrealistic or inaccurate impressions of Foreign Service life lead eventually to dissatisfaction and frustration, and that the wife should be given an "honest evaluation" of her role in the Foreign Service so that the couple can "work out some of these questions when they are considering entering."

The initial pre-entrance orientation can be general, but once the family has entered the Foreign Service, the wife needs more detailed and specific information. If she has questions on health, education, housing, financial management or training, there is no one place where she

can go to obtain this information. It is scattered in many different offices, and the wife, being unfamiliar with the Department, is bewildered when she starts trying to find answers to her questions. The husband may not be able to answer all her questions either, and there is no one person, Foreign Service employee or counselor, to whom the two of them can turn for advice or answers to their questions.

In a letter received by the Forum, a wife says, "I get the impression from talking to new arrivals (at post) and from talking to new Foreign Service wives at the Family Workshop that the information on one's allowances, health benefits, shipment of effects, per diem, even the advice to keep open a Stateside bank account, is far from easy to come by. So many new personnel are misled or uninformed. 'I didn't know we could do that... didn't know we were supposed to do this...' The husband is occupied with higher considerations as to what type of job he is to do and how to prepare for it--to him it probably seems crass to try to get all one is entitled to during the transition period."

Another wife writes, "The wives know nothing about their husband's jobs or what our government is doing overseas."

Wives who have attended the Junior Officer Course at FSI with their husbands have found this orientation helpful, but many cannot attend. Often they are unaware that they are allowed to participate. Many times the employee's family does not accompany him to Washington for basic training, either because they do not have the money to live in Washington for the training period, or because they have obligations and responsibilities at their former place of residence. Wives with young children are unable to attend because of the lack of child care facilities at FSI.

The information on foreign posts and how to proceed to post is also scattered. It often happens that the husband precedes the wife to post, and she is the one who is responsible for packing up the household effects and making arrangements for herself and the family to join the husband. Wives need to know where they can get information and assistance.

One wife says, "I think that information on the Foreign Service should be consolidated and put into a packet. When we were getting ready to go overseas, my husband would bring home pamphlets pertaining to regulations in the Foreign Service, but it was confusing for me because I did not get an overall view of everything that had to be done." "I also feel that the information should be as concrete as possible."

Another wife suggests that "the services that are available to wives should be documented in a publication that is updated frequently and eventually paid for by the Department of State, i.e., medicals every two years, services available through AFSA, the services of the lounge, etc." "More emphasis should be placed on explaining F.S. regulations and how they apply to the family, perhaps in the Family Workshop or in special seminars at post."

The Family Liaison Office (FLO) recommended by the Forum in this report could provide spouses with most of the orientation material they need or refer them to the appropriate resources. The Forum has recommended that FLO initiate direct contact with the spouse to correct the present, inadequate system of relaying information--"the husband route"--both before and after entrance into the Foreign Service. FLO would provide the foreign affairs agencies with a channel of communication with families and would assist spouses in gaining access to the information they need to function successfully.

In addition, counseling services within FLO could provide new spouses with an opportunity to discuss their concerns about Foreign Service life. An interview with both the employee and the spouse before their first assignment could promote a better understanding of Foreign Service life in general and could insure that the new family gains as full an appreciation of Foreign Service life as possible.

### Training

Most Foreign Service wives believe that improved training opportunities could make their lives in the Foreign Service more rewarding and could enhance their contribution to their families and the service. However, the Department of State should realize that many wives are unable to attend

full-time classes--sometimes because the classes are open only on a "space available" basis, and sometimes because of conflicting family responsibilities.

The present small attendance of spouses in classes at FSI is not an indication of spouses' interest in further training. Spouses are interested in all aspects of training--from language study and area studies to the excellent and varied courses offered by the Workshop for Foreign Service Families.

The Forum received many letters from women who think it is essential for them to speak the language of the country in which they are living:

"Allow wives to train in languages. Not just before departing and on a space available basis. If it's important for the man to speak, it is equally important for the wife. She'll be much more willing to entertain people she can communicate with."

"Actually, I have found that by making an effort to learn the Arabic language, I can talk to the Arabic women and understand how they see themselves, as the encouragers and domestic caretakers to their families, and I can hear from first hand exactly what they think. Although they don't understand my role, it is a very good feeling to know that I could establish communication within two years. With two more years, there might even be a dialogue or understanding. At least these women have the satisfaction of knowing someone takes a real interest in them, enjoys their language, and learns from them."

"I have resolved that I will never go to a country again without language training. Being unable to speak the language makes me more dependent on my husband, increasing my fears of living in a new place, reduces my self-confidence and nourishes resentments. Not only should language be available at FSI for wives on an equal basis (not just tag-along with classes set up for officers) but also classes should be set up at post on an intensive basis for wives. Such an investment by the Department would bring enormous benefits to morale and capability."



"No room in language class. We cannot be admitted if there are already six people in a class. So, we go overseas unable to speak the language. Very ugly American."

Many wives would like permission to take the language proficiency test for a rating upon completion of language training.

The Forum has recommended that the Department set a high priority on training in languages and other cross-cultural skills for spouses and that the Department make training and orientation materials more widely available by issuing them in written form or on cassettes and videotapes. These materials should be available at posts abroad as well as in Washington. Per diem for family members to accompany the employee to Washington for orientation, training and consultation would allow many more wives to gain the benefits of increased training opportunities, and child care facilities at FSI would free many mothers of young children to attend classes. All wives feel that the money spent by the government to encourage wives to attend courses or to make materials available to them for home study would be money well spent.

## Re-entry Study Group Report

For many Foreign Service wives, re-entry to the United States is a time of severe stress. For families that have served many years abroad, re-adjustment to life in the United States is similar to adjustment to life in a foreign country.

The difficulties of this transition have not been fully appreciated by the Department of State, possibly because it assumes that returning home should not, in theory, present problems to families. However, women reported that the very fact that problems are not expected makes the transition more difficult.

The Forum's Re-entry Study Group analyzed the factors that are a part of the re-entry crisis, as presented in letters, the FSI Re-entry Seminar and other conversations and found that, while all families do not experience the same combination of difficulties, the following stresses play a part in "re-entry shock."

### Reverse Culture Shock

American life is considerably more complex, competitive, commercial and congested than life at most foreign posts. The wife must adjust to a sometimes radically different life style after years in a foreign environment. While adapting to these conditions, she is at the same time coping with the adjustment problems of her husband and children--the whole family needs reassuring.

Loneliness is a factor for the wife who may have few social contacts in the Washington area. She often feels like a outsider in the neighborhood and community where, for many, there is no network of family, relatives or old friends for emotional support. This is particularly the case for foreign-born wives. The sense of anonymity is heightened by the feeling that no one understands or cares about her problems, and the average American is indifferent to her intercultural experience.

Feelings of alienation are strong, although sometimes ill-defined. To quote a few wives: "Extreme change can give one a sense of unreality. Altogether one tends to feel like a being from outer space." "I felt like a foreigner in my own country." "I don't feel quite American."

The rapidity of change in the United States intensifies the likelihood that the wife will feel very much "out of it" after only a few years away. In this country, the women's movement, for example, burgeoned while she was abroad. The Foreign Service wife feels she has not kept up with her colleagues in the American mainstream and loses confidence in herself.

Many wives suffer an "identity crisis" upon re-entry. Abroad, whatever the problems of foreign living, the wife was part of the official American community. She may have felt that she was a significant spokesperson of the United States as the wife of a diplomat. Back home she is anonymous, at least temporarily.

Special problems frequently arise: returning as a widow with no home base or network of old friends; a child returning for schooling, unaccompanied by a parent; or a wife returning ahead of her husband for purposes of children's schooling. In addition to the emotional trauma, all of these circumstances may entail great financial hardship, particularly if temporary housing allowances or other benefits do not apply.

#### Medical Treatment

The impersonality of the Medical Division was cited by an astonishing number of wives as contributing to the stress of returning to the United States. Many wives wrote that medical personnel are insensitive to the emotional strain being experienced by the whole family. Wives feel that they are not treated with respect and dignity and that there is little appreciation of how frightening unfamiliar tropical diseases, for example, can be. They also reported inadequate practical help with the follow-up of service-induced medical problems. In sum, the Medical Division was seen as augmenting the trauma of transition rather than ameliorating it, as it might be expected to do, by the sympathetic handling of family members.

### Housing Difficulties

Although the Foreign Service family abroad should be aware of the steadily increasing cost of housing in the Washington area, the reality upon returning is a shock. While searching for an affordable house, families face bewildering choices of geographical jurisdiction and school districts. Since the employee often begins working soon after the family's return, the house search falls to the wife. She may at the same time be caring for her children, who are not yet placed in school and who have no friends.

With only one month temporary allowance, the pressure to find housing quickly is severe. No family attempting to buy a house upon return to the United States can possibly expect to be settled within the 30-day period covered by the temporary housing allowance. Even if the family found the right house on the first day of their search, the process of securing financing and coming to settlement takes a minimum of 30 days, and often as long as 60 days. When the 30-day temporary housing allowance expires, the family must move to other temporary quarters, often paying a very high rent for the privilege of a short-term lease.

### Children's Education and Adjustment

Foreign Service children have special problems in this area. They may be academically far ahead, far behind, or both at the same time, according to subject. Mothers need to make decisions, often under the pressure of time, and may lack the detailed knowledge of Washington area schools necessary for wise choices.

Children suffer the same cultural shock as their parents. They miss their friends, school, sports and overseas environment. It is hard to fit into the peer group in Washington--they are different, and they have a sense of being rejected because of different experiences.

### Career Continuity

A returning wife is often faced with picking up the threads of her education or career, abandoned when she went abroad. She has lost her professional and other contacts,

and she worries that if she starts something new (job or education), it will be one more thing to "pack up" when she goes overseas again.

#### Poor Communication with the State Department

Wives feel that there is little recognition by the Department of problems facing families. There is a sense of being treated "with more disdain than deference," to quote one wife. The Foreign Service wife believes that she is an integral part of the diplomatic unit and should be recognized as such. She does not receive adequate information about regulations and benefits affecting the family. Information directed to a wife via her husband never reaches her, with the result that the wife remains poorly informed and is thus handicapped in coping with family matters.

## Re-entry and the Forum Recommendations

Several of the recommendations made by the Forum in this report would help to facilitate the transition to life back home.

### Recommendation #1: FLO

The Family Liaison Office (FLO) would serve as an information center for families and could refer women to information on housing, education and regulations affecting the family's recent transfer. This service would be especially helpful to women who have returned to Washington without their husbands or for those whose husbands have begun working in Washington and cannot help the family settle in.

By maintaining contact with posts abroad, FLO could help reduce the "shock" element of re-entry, insuring that families abroad are well-informed on what to expect in Washington.

Counseling services at FLO would insure that wives have easy access to someone who recognizes and understands their problems. Pre-crisis counseling, the availability of someone with whom the wife can "talk it over," would facilitate the family's successful readjustment.

The Spouses' Skills/Talent Bank would help women maintain career continuity, and career counseling would help the spouse to gain the full benefit of her overseas experiences in the Washington area job market.

FLO could also serve as a re-entry registration center, facilitating the efforts of AAFSW to institute better publicized and more successful "Welcome Home" activities.

### Recommendation #3: Training

The Re-entry Seminar at FSI would be more beneficial to families if the materials presented were available before

the family returns. By knowing what to expect, the family would be better prepared to cope with the re-entry situation. Take-home materials, printed materials, cassettes and audio-video materials could be prepared on the subject of re-entry for distribution abroad.

Recommendation #5 (Travel) and Recommendation #6 (Medical) relate to the travel and medical needs of returning families as described above and need no further explanation.

Recommendation #8: (Education)

The Foreign Service Educational and Counseling Center (FSECC) is working to create an up-to-date file on schools in the Washington area. FSECC has offered to provide a complete re-entry package on schools in Washington for distribution to Foreign Service families preparing to return. The Forum requests funding for FSECC, which is supported by contributions from AFSA and AAFSW for the presentation and distribution of this package.

## Women in Transition Study Group Report

The Study Group on Women in Transition was set up to consider the problems which confront a Foreign Service wife at the termination of her Foreign Service "career," either by retirement, widowhood or divorce. The committee devoted most of its attention to the problems of widowhood, separated and divorced women, since retired women did not communicate serious adjustment problems to the Forum.

At the time of widowhood, separation or divorce, the Foreign Service wife is uniquely handicapped in coping with financial, emotional or physical difficulties. She has been geographically and culturally separated from her home roots and probably has been totally dependent on her husband for support and financial planning. In addition, she has had no direct contact with the Department of State.

In a period of rapidly changing concepts of the role of women, there has been an increasing acceptance of a woman's need to be an independent individual with her own place in the economic world. However, the Foreign Service wife is uniquely deprived of the opportunity for continuous training and continuous employment because of the demands of Foreign Service life. As one wife said, "If a wife gives up her own career to support that of her husband she takes a terrific risk. If he should die or divorce her, she will have no resume of skills meaningful to a future employer."

The present insecurity of the Foreign Service wife is aggravated by the rapid spread nation-wide of the "no-fault divorce" and the easing of divorce laws generally, and by the growing realization that "terrorism" has become a tool of diplomacy, and that she is more likely than her predecessors to become a "woman in transition" at an earlier age.

A central point in the discussion of widowhood and divorce is the principle of accrued rights: that the unearning wife earns a gradually accruing fund of rights and vested interests in whatever future requisites are acquired in the marriage and assured to her husband.



These accrued rights are being recognized nationally in the following ways:

1. Under the new tax reform law of 1976, a non-working wife can set up an independent, tax-free retirement account in her own name.
2. Social Security payments to wives recognize a wife's vested interest in a marriage.
3. Representative Patricia Schroeder of Colorado has proposed a bill to amend the Civil Service retirement plan, to provide that a former spouse who has been married to a Federal employee for at least twenty years would be entitled to a portion of that employee's retirement annuity.

Foreign Service wives earn accrued rights in a marriage on the basis of the generally observed practice of moving households at regular short intervals--with attendant hardships in change of climate, health conditions, available schooling, varied housing and new languages--sometimes to posts with little intellectual stimulation and no opportunity to be gainfully employed, with the obligation to act as a partner with the Foreign Service husband in representing the United States abroad.

The Department of State ought now to recognize these rights and interests by providing the wife with information so that she can determine what security she is entitled to on the basis of her presence overseas at post with her husband, such as the continuance of medical insurance, travel and schooling rights for children and the current condition of the husband's retirement or disability benefits.

The Family Liaison Office (FLO) proposed by the Forum would be of great benefit to the widowed, separated or divorced woman, providing and promoting a "feeling of respectability about seeking guidance" which is lacking at present. FLO would serve as a point of direct contact between the spouse and the Department of State, and the office's counseling services could be invaluable during the period of transition. Through its contact with posts abroad, FLO could provide assistance for women in difficulty around the world by disseminating information and locating help.

The committee hopes that the Department of State will take an interest in Representative Schroeder's bill mentioned above. As one wife says, "I hope thought will be given to providing for the other half of the husband-wife teams that make successful diplomatic service possible. Personnel serving abroad know that the husband goes from one government office to another...only the view from his window changes. It is the wife who struggles to build a safe and healthy home environment for the family."

At present, Mrs. Schroeder is preparing similar legislation for the military, and she has said that she will then turn her attention to the Foreign Service. Foreign Service wives feel that they are entitled to the same protection as the wives of Civil Service employees.

The committee would also like to call the Department of State's attention to the need to reinstate the obligatory nature of the provision for the survivor's annuity, with no right allowed the wife to waive the claim or the husband's obligation. Provision of a survivor's annuity was required for a few years to provide relief for widows. However, the regulations adopted in 1976 have dropped this requirement, and many wives consider this to be a step backward. They feel the husband should not have the right to ignore their vested interests in the marriage and that the provision of survivor's annuities should be compulsory. (This concern was not presented to the AAFSW Board, and therefore it is not included here as a recommendation but as a topic for further study and discussion.)

The suggestions above are made with the adage in mind that "the time to prepare the ship for the storm is not when the hurricane's on." The Foreign Service wife who is assured that her rights are recognized, that help will be at hand if and when she needs it, and that her future is not unfairly clouded by the personal sacrifice she makes in serving overseas, will make a greater contribution to the foreign affairs effort.

