

Many Rhodesian women feel that if a multiracial delegation from their country had been at Geneva, things might have gone differently.

They say that women care more about human relations than do men, and are often natural peacemakers.

Last month, 57 000, including 5 000 black women, presented a peace petition to Mr Ivor Richard the British Chairman of the Geneva Conference before he left their country.

Bridging the gap between the races is not only being done on a person-to-person basis, but in two main activist streams, of which the peace petition and its backers is one.

The other is via the Liaison Committee of National Women's Organisations under whose umbrella, thousands of women of all races and shades of opinion operate.

However white women in rural districts feel tribal women are still light years away from this dawning.

Resentment and mistrust on both sides which has been accelerated by the war must now be healed, not only with active lobbying in high places, but through person to person contact, say the town dwellers.

One non-political multiracial group of women has been meeting for the past three years in Salisbury homes to prove that women of all races can get to know each other on a caring level.

Some of these meetings have been held at the home of Stella Fry, a South African, married to an academic, who has lived in Rhodesia for eight years.

"Bridge building is one simple job all women can do," she says.

Stella uses her home for multiracial teas and din-



**PENNY BARNETT** . . . bridge building in the home.



**JILL BAKER** . . . communication and consolidation.



**HELEN HYSLOP** . . . paternalism is a dirty word.



**MORWENA SIVEWRIGHT** . . . it's not half as bad as people make out.

On a recent visit to Rhodesia, **LUCY GOUGH BERGER** probed women's reactions to a country in crisis.

## Women want to play peacemaker

ners, to which husbands are invited where possible, and where all those attending can get to know each other at grassroots level.

Rhodesian schoolteacher, Penny Barnett, goes along with this but believes that relationships can be improved only by people first setting their own homes in order.

Penny joined the Moral Rearmament movement a year ago and finds that the group's philosophy of

living piously and honestly is paying dividends.

"As soon as you start cleaning up your own life, starting with your relationship with your husband, your children and your servants, it spreads like an epidemic."

Penny began in a small way, by returning textbooks she had "borrowed" from a school where she had once taught.

She then voluntarily paid income tax on earnings she had not declared.

It was as a result of a meeting in Penny's home, that a black woman and a white woman, decided it was time for women's voices to be heard and they drafted a peace letter.

It snowballed, and "suddenly it was out of our hands," says Penny.

Within 24 hours, 22 500 signatures had been collected. It rapidly grew to 57 000.

Among those who presented this petition to Mr Richard was Jill Baker, a Salisbury radio and TV personality, who had previously formed an organisation to boost the morale of army wives who felt left out of their husbands' commitment.

"The petition came at exactly the right moment — when there was a tremendous increase in the feeling that we women must work among ourselves to communicate and consolidate our position with the African women," says Jill.

Why did only 5 000 black women sign the petition?

One reason is that traditionally black Rhodesian women do not come forward. Another is that they are afraid of being victimised if they associate themselves with a petition misrepresented as

being just another Rhodesian Front trick.

However, a nucleus of black women did come forward to form the liaison committee's multiracial women's delegation to Mr Richard, which was led by forthright Helen Hyslop, a civil servant and mother of two sons who are in the army.

Mrs Hyslop is on intimate terms with the leaders of the black women in some of the organisations she liaises with.

"It's time we stopped harping on the good works we have done for the blacks in the past.

"Now, we just have to change our stance," she says.