



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN

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**REPORT OF THE 28th IFUW CONFERENCE
PERTH, AUSTRALIA
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Conference Reporter*

The great joy of an IFUW Conference arises from the meeting of friends from all over the world, and the sharing of experiences in the intervening years. In 2004 this meeting of friends started in Singapore for many members and their spouses, as many attended the two-day pre-conference "Friendship Tour". For those who did not have the pleasure of the Singapore Tour, the joy started on arrival in Perth, as friends met in the Sheraton or other hotels, or just met casually in the street on the way to or from the hotels.

Over 400 members from 48 countries attended the conference, and of these 126 were first time attendees. In addition there were 56 accompanying non-members. For first time attendees, a Conference can seem a little daunting, but friendships are soon made, especially at the opening ceremony and reception. The meetings took place at the Sheraton Perth Hotel, which has good technical facilities and space to discuss issues over coffee breaks and lunches.

At the opening ceremony we were treated to an unusual musical interlude given by the University of Western Australia Classical Brass Ensemble. The President of the Australian Federation, Rosemary Everett, commenced the formalities and there was a moving welcome from Nyungar Birdiyia Yogka, Marie Taylor, the representative of the local indigenous people. Professor Reiko Aoki, the IFUW President, officially opened the Conference with a speech on the contribution made by IFUW members to their societies and the world. The keynote speaker, Dr Hilary Charlesworth, gave an outstanding address on the conference theme, *Humanizing Globalization: Empowering Women*. A renowned academic and defender of human rights, she is currently Director of the Centre for International and Public Law, in the Faculty of Law at the Australian National University.

The 86th Council Meeting, held on 4th August produced a most unpleasant shock for all concerned, when Nancy Rustad, the President of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) announced that the AAUW would not be paying its dues to IFUW from 2005. It became obvious that even many of the American delegates were not party to this decision of their Board of Officers. The ensuing discussion had little effect on Ms Rustad who seemed oblivious to the opprobrium she had aroused. The situation of the loss of AAUW dues exacerbated the need for the dues increase of CHF6 per annum, and also precipitated the necessity for a Task Force to be appointed to consider the entire operation of IFUW.

There was some productive discussion on the role and operation of the organization and structure of IFUW in the 21st century, and it was agreed to recommend that Conference create a task force of suitable members to meet in Geneva, and after investigation and discussion, to make representations on what changes and improvements would be desirable. National Federations and Associations (NFAs) were asked to nominate members with specific skills to make up this task force. The "Young Members", who no longer qualify as "Young" members and are now calling themselves the "Next Generation" group, gave considerable thought to this subject and came up with a specification of what skills were needed by the members of the Task Force. This specification was very well received by the membership.

At the 86th Council Meeting, the Convener of the Membership Committee, Marianne Haslegrave announced that the Board of Officers had admitted six new associate members: Albania and the Solomon Islands in 2003, and Burundi, Guatemala, Spain and Tanzania in 2004. With the introduction of these new associate members IFUW is now proud to include 78 national affiliates. A written vote by the Council during the triennium had approved a change to full member status for associations in Bulgaria, Costa Rica and Singapore.

The report of the Finance Committee made rather sad reading since the years 2002 and 2003 resulted in deficits of CHF 63,000 and 104,000 respectively. However, the enthusiasm of the conference attendees made it very clear that the IFUW still addresses the needs and desires of graduate women throughout the world. This makes it even more distressing to realise that one of the founder associations, the American Association of University Women, was so willing to disassociate itself from IFUW, without any attempt to be part of the solution rather than being the major cause of the problem.

The morning of 5th August, the beginning of the Conference itself, began with the introduction of the new members to the assembly. Members from the new affiliates Burundi, The Solomon Islands and Tanzania spoke of the conditions in their countries and the need for women graduates to work for the upliftment of women in developing countries. It is clear that the conditions of women in many countries is “nasty, brutish and short”, particularly in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Following on the introductions, the housekeeping matters, such as local arrangements, etc. were dealt with, the Rules of Procedure agreed and the minutes of the 27th Conference held in Ottawa agreed.

As there was only one candidate for President, Griselda Kenyon of Great Britain was declared President by acclamation. The election of Vice Presidents took place, according to the new voting system, with Louise Croot of New Zealand, Birten Gökyay of Turkey, Kathleen Laurila of the USA and Phyllis Scott of Canada being elected. Terry Oudraad of The Netherlands was declared Treasurer for a second term by acclamation.

We were then entertained and enlightened by a review of the foundation of IFUW by members from Great Britain, USA, Canada, France, India, The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. The Keynote Speaker from the Opening Ceremony, Dr Hilary Charlesworth, told of the role of IFUW in her personal educational experience, namely that as a recipient of an IFUW Fellowship she had been enabled to continue her studies at a time when, without IFUW support, this would not have been possible. The American representative gave a very short presentation about early members of AAUW, highlighting Virginia Gildersleeve who was IFUW President twice. The British Federation began with a meeting of 17 women at Manchester High School, making it all the more appropriate that the next conference, during BFWG’s centennial year, will be held in Manchester; while the Canadian delegation spoke briefly about their history. The French delegation spoke on many of their illustrious founder members, including Marie Curie, Marie Louise Puech-Milhau, who organised the resistance to the Nazi occupation in the South of France during the Second World War, Christine Morrow and Jeanne Chaton who not only organised war-time resistance but helped with the rebuilding of the country after the war, and worked to help women in Eastern Europe. These histories were illustrated by PowerPoint presentations. The whole session was entitled “Message from the Past”.

The President, Reiko Aoki, then chaired a session giving an overview of the last triennium (2001 – 2004), and in particular stressed the work of regional groupings. Two regional groupings were highlighted, namely the Pacific Graduate Women’s Network (PGWNet) and University Women of Europe (UWE).

PGWNet encompasses seven IFUW member countries, representatives from Papua New Guinea and several other Pacific Islands where groups are not yet formed. The members from the Pacific Islands feel a strong need to be part of an international organisation. They held a Council meeting in 2003 and will next hold one in Samoa. The Virginia Gildersleeve fund has provided the finance for workshops, while the Australian and New Zealand federations have been very supportive.

The University Women of Europe encompasses 22 countries, and holds one meeting per year. Recent conferences have been held in Hungary, Croatia, France and Norway, and a summer school has been held in Albania, while there will be a summer school in Macedonia this year. The next UWE Conference will be held in Cork, Ireland, in June 2005.

UWE is accredited to the Council of Europe and works for its aims. They also lobby for IFUW goals, especially the elimination of violence and discrimination against women. The most telling remark from the UWE was that IFUW confirms the value of sisterhood.

Another IFUW grouping is the Young Members Network, which although comparatively small makes a very effective contribution to IFUW and its Conferences. One of their reports was used by the “Way Forward Group”, while changes have been made to the Conference on its recommendation. Young members assist at Conferences, work on resolutions, and correspond by e-mail. The Group finds the mission of IFUW very appealing and feels that by applying it they can help to change the world.

The last item of the day was a presentation of a joint activity between local groups in Canada, the Netherlands and the USA on ageing. The point was made that, "Ageing is NOT a problem; it is a SUCCESS!" However, ageing is a women's issue, since the majority of the aged and the caregivers are women. All women need intellectual stimulation, and IFUW provides great opportunities for older women, especially in the positive aspects of ageing. NFAs can recruit older women, support retirement options, provide social events for women, use older women to mentor younger women, and ask them to suggest creative ideas on advocacy, self-confidence and care. At least two resolutions at this Conference came from older women, and were passed unanimously.

Friday 6th August was devoted to the presentation of constitutional and other resolutions, the membership growth challenge, fund raising, projects relating to the Study and Action Programme, the Bina Roy Programme, the triennial report of NFAs "IFUW in Action", the reports of our representatives at the United Nations, and a discussion on globalisation and the empowerment of women.

There were several resolutions for amendments to the Constitution proposed by the Board of Officers aimed at streamlining the Constitution and making it more relevant to the 21st century. Some were passed with some changes in wording, some were passed as presented, and some were withdrawn after discussion. One amendment suggesting that Conference be held every four years was withdrawn after the delegates made it clear that they were opposed to the change. The substitution of "graduate women" for "university women" throughout the constitution and by-laws was accepted. The increase of 6 Swiss francs per capita in the dues was accepted by a majority of the NFAs, although the US abstained from voting.

The "Membership Growth Challenge" proved to be very interesting and produced many ideas which could be used by NFAs to increase membership. Ireland had been particularly effective in recruitment using the IFUW PowerPoint presentation, and the theme of "How can you make a difference?" They initiated a project of Public Speaking for under-15 school girls, and produced a book titled, "A Danger to Men", which was the memories of early graduates of Trinity College, Dublin. It should also be noted that the Irish Federation is just that – a federation of university graduates of the Irish Republic and of Northern Ireland. (Perhaps if women were given more say they could indeed change the world!) The Irish Federation also have a fund raising drive based on "Ladies who Lunch" and have been able to boast of a 10% increase in membership in the last 3 years.

Korea has increased membership by 50% in the last three years by adopting a system of each member introducing two new members and placing the onus on the members to collect the dues from their friends, and by operating "Women's Development" centres.

Mexico's success in increasing membership by 12% was attributed to hard work! They have recruited from universities and the professions, and have also moved their annual meetings among the different states in the country where they have successfully garnered recruits in the different states.

Projects related to the Study and Action Programme of *Humanizing Globalization: Empowering Women* were highlighted in presentations by Vanuatu, Nigeria, Samoa and Canada.

Vanuatu's project was aimed at publicizing the problems of "Domestic Violence", a problem that is rife in that country. They have promoted human rights through the Magistrates Courts, and have encouraged the whole community to become involved in the project.

Nigeria convened a two-day national workshop on "Conflict Prevention and Resolution". Conflict is a major problem in the country, so the Association was pleased when 30 members convened the workshop and at least 150 people attended. The media was interested, thus giving the Nigerian Association good publicity, while a book containing the talks and presentations is being published.

Samoa began a dictionary project for schools. Deserving girls were given dictionaries as prizes, and the prize winners were monitored and given scholarships. This "Dictionary Prize" has become one of the most prestigious prizes in Samoa. To fund the scheme the Association gives monthly luncheons and fund raising dinners with top speakers.

In Canada, the British Columbia area organized a programme called, “Women and Children Last”, aimed at shaming the provincial government, which has reduced funding to social projects. By publicizing the impact on women and children of such government cuts, and with the publicity generated (with the help of the “Raging Grannies”) they have increased awareness of this problem in their province.

Anne Touwen gave a short overview of the Bina Roy Partners in Development Programme and urged delegates to view the poster presentations in the foyer of the projects supported by the scheme.

Vice President Ati Blom then presented the Triennial Reports of National Affiliates, *IFUW in Action*, to the audience and gave President Reiko Aoki the first copy hot off the press.

The presentations of the IFUW representatives to the United Nations were very interesting and frightening at the same time. Most members of IFUW feel that this international recognition is one of the most vital benefits of membership. Discussion and action at local level can be passed on to national headquarters and from thence to our representatives, who can and do present our deliberations and concerns to the world bodies. It is an added incentive to belonging to an NFA.

Catherine Moore, one of our representatives to the United Nations in New York, made the point that our advocacy served to enhance the role of women and especially girls. IFUW had been very effective in forming coalitions and often became the co-ordinator and spokeswomen for substantive committees of the CONGO (Conference of NGOs). She noted that the US has not signed CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women). She also reported on UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), and urged members to celebrate International Women’s Day. The New York NGO Committee on Social Development was working on a programme aimed at eliminating violence against women.

Marianne Bernheim, Coordinator of our representatives in Paris at UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), pointed out that one member of the IFUW team, Françoise Sauvage, chairs the committee of 234 NGOs. The main focus of the IFUW representatives there is gender mainstreaming and higher education. On the topic of urban sustainable development we have been able to introduce a gender slant. She encouraged us to work for and to promote the Decade for Promotion of Higher Education for Sustainable Development which starts on 1 January 2005.

Conchita Poncini is the Coordinator of our representatives to the United Nations and its specialized agencies in Geneva. IFUW participates in NGO committees such as the NGO Committee on the Commission for the Status of Women, of which Conchita is the President. She and is very active in promoting gender issues during the annual session of the Commission on Human Rights. Our team participates in activities related to the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XI), and in the reform of the United Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO). In the ILO we are trying to change the constitution to remove discrimination against women. Katherine Hagen, past Deputy Director General of the ILO, has joined the IFUW team in Geneva. IFUW commands respect from other delegates because of its well-prepared presentations and we are seen as role models for women. Conchita concluded her presentation by explaining that it is necessary for IFUW to apply for “general” category status, so that we can become even more effective in our advocacy work within the system of the United Nations.

Griselda Kenyon stressed that the NFAs need to make themselves known to their governments.

It was suggested that NFAs should make every effort to discuss important topics, such as: the Millennium Development Goals, women in the economy, international mechanisms to promote the status of women, trafficking of women and children, and the emerging issue of poverty and violence against women. It was very sad to learn that there is a danger that the UN is back-tracking on gender issues.

Saturday, 7th August was devoted to Interdisciplinary Seminars, probably the most stimulating day of the Conference. In seven Seminars over 70 seminar papers and poster presentations were given by members from Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Canada, Costa Rica, Egypt, Fiji, Finland, France, Great Britain, Ghana, Ireland, Israel, India, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, South Africa, the Solomon Islands, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tanzania, Turkey, the USA, Uganda, and Vanuatu. Within the conference theme, the papers addressed issues of the social, economic and political perspectives of Humanizing Globalization, the Empowerment of Women, Gender Issues in Education and a Culture of Peace. Examining issues such as these from diverse national and ethnic viewpoints is a unique part of any IFUW Conference.

The “Australian Evening” was held at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, where we were entertained by an aborigine playing the didgeridoo, followed by an interpretation of aboriginal dance by students from the University of Western Australia. We were encouraged to wander through the gallery and view the mostly local art on display.

Sunday, 8th August was Workshops Day at the beautiful campus of the University of Western Australia. Over 20, two-hour workshops, submitted by national affiliates, gave members a chance to interact in small groups on subjects relating to the Study and Action Programme. The day was designed for participation and for the sharing of knowledge and experience resulting from work on the Programme over the last three years. In the late afternoon of that day, there were open discussions on the Resolutions and Constitutional amendments.

Monday 9th August was devoted to resolutions. The resolutions often form the backbone of the Conference because they highlight the issues, relative to IFUW and the NFAs that have arisen during the triennium. After the previous discussions earlier in the Conference, the Resolutions Committee, headed by Hazel Bowen from South Africa, had met on several occasions and consolidated, tidied and reworded the resolutions into suitable forms. There was further discussion on several points and some of the wording, but the important resolutions were passed, notwithstanding a tendency for voting to be divided by the difference in outlook between developed and developing countries.

The interdisciplinary seminars, the workshops and the resolutions provide the stimulation for action by the NFAs as the cross-pollination of ideas take place. They are the foundation of the IFUW’s collective influence on policy and action from the United Nations down to the individual branches and members.

The final day of the Conference, 10th August, provided the culmination of the work of the Conference and dealt with the future and functions of IFUW.

The functions of IFUW as a co-ordinator of the work of NFAs were seen as communication, voice and image-making of information. A comprehensive communication strategy was presented as:

- G Growth
- I Involvement
- R Recognition – a major force in gender equity and education
- L Leverage – which increases effectiveness.

The Voice of IFUW can best be heard through information, advocacy, input and feedback between NFAs and IFUW, networking and sharing with like-minded organizations such as Soroptimists and transparency of policy decisions.

Image-making and information results from publications and statements and should be fostered through contact with the media and public relations.

After this discussion we were treated to a speech by Dr Anne Pauwels, of the University of Western Australia, dealing with gender and communications. She made it clear that women needed to make the effort to shape their own communications, and to make full use of technology changes. They need to become originators and not followers of technology developments. She left us with a question on which we need to ponder: “Is the language we use reflecting our gender?”

Communication is the buzzword of the 21st century and English is the world’s lingua franca. Nevertheless, women are the custodians of linguistic diversity and the primary language guardians.

This presentation engendered a lively discussion period which was unfortunately cut short due to time constraints, but it left the audience stimulated and anxious to learn more.

The next section dealt with the new Programme for Action (previously called the Study and Action Programme). It is “Women as Agents for Change”, and it focuses on three key areas: education, the information society and human security and peace.

Under education it was stressed that we need inclusive, participative and goal centred education, including literacy, numeracy, media and economic education for all by 2015. The information society allows us to highlight IFUW’s vision, which can be available to all and which can link divergent communities. We need, however, to be aware of the difficulties and problems of information overload. So far women are not

participating as much as men and we need to be content producers. There are many challenges ahead, and we must turn challenges into opportunities. Above all, young women must be strongly encouraged to make careers in technology.

It was pointed out that human security was a post-cold-war concept, well defined in the Millennium Development Goals. IFUW can make a signal contribution to disseminating and effecting these goals because of our unique interdisciplinary capabilities. We can act locally, nationally and internationally.

The income of IFUW and its NFAs comes from dues, raising funds and business and resource development. The latter requires thought and planning before being put into practice.

“The Next Generation” group was given an opportunity to present themselves and their vision and plans for the future.

There was a discussion on some of the outstanding resolutions, particularly on the creation of “Think tanks on emerging issues”.

The British Federation of Women Graduates then presented a preview of the next Conference to be held in Manchester in 2007, while the Hegg Hoffett Shop announced that a profit of AUS\$ 9,029.55 had been made for the Fund. The Resolutions Committee issued its report and mentioned that names and dates of UN reports were needed, that resolutions should be submitted well before a Conference and that the word “lobby” should not be used in resolutions. It was also suggested that workshops presented by two or more NFAs should be discussed well ahead of time.

Finally there was a summing up of the Conference by the President, Reiko Aoki, and a closing by the new President, Griselda Kenyon.

As a final note, one of the Vice Presidents, Phyllis Scott of Canada left us with a quotation from the “Raging Grannies”: “If all the money in the world went to education, and the military had to hold bake sales to raise money, it would be a better world!”

At the Farewell Dinner the young members gave us a gentle parody on an IFUW Conference which was enjoyed by all. Donations for the Fellowships raffle netted CHF 5,500 and the Hegg Hoffet Fund raised CHF 7,200. Everyone left after promising to meet friends in Manchester in 2007!