



## TRIENNIAL REPORT OF THE IFUW SECRETARY GENERAL

It has been a challenging triennium. The changes required to address the financial crisis created by the AAUW decision to cease paying dues have been major. The staff members at IFUW Headquarters have approached this situation with a positive attitude and a willingness to assist the IFUW Board of Officers and other international leaders to find solutions to help the International Federation regroup and move ahead with its mission.

### **Restructuring of Headquarters**

As mentioned in the Board and Finance Committee reports, the Headquarters' staff has been reduced to the equivalent of 3.2 full-time positions. The decisions involved were difficult ones. Murielle Joye, then Secretary General, worked closely with the Board, the Assistant Treasurer in Geneva and other staff members through the end of 2004 and into 2005 to examine alternatives. In addition to the suppression of a part-time support position that was already vacant, we had to say goodbye to two long-serving staff members in December 2005, Romey Scott-Woods and Stephanie Bolliger. We thank them for their important contributions to IFUW over the years. The four other members of staff remained, Christine Marijan and Susan Phillips with reduced working hours (60% and 80% respectively). A younger French woman, Emmanuelle Eberhardt joined the staff as the second administrative assistant (50%).

In January 2006, we moved into new premises. We were fortunate that the new space, while slightly smaller and definitely less expensive, is still very suitable for IFUW's needs. We were also able to find good hotel and meeting facilities nearby for the annual Board and Committee meetings.

Six months later, the final changes were implemented. Murielle Joye retired, after ten years of service. Special thanks go to Murielle for her many contributions to IFUW as team leader during this time. We are pleased that she will continue to share her experience as an *ad hoc* member of IFUW's team of Representatives to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris and as one of the organizers of the special *IFUW Friends* support initiative. Leigh Bradford Ratteree, the Programme Officer, was appointed as the new Secretary General (80%). Anamaria Vere, who had worked for IFUW part-time while a graduate student a few years ago, returned to take up the Programme Officer position (50%), to work primarily with communications. She brings an excellent combination of programme and web skills, as well as knowledge of Spanish, and will be an important asset to the team.

Individual working hours are staggered to allow the office to operate on a slightly reduced schedule, closing on Friday afternoons and working hours from 8.30 to 16.30 on the other days. In addition, the office is now closed two weeks in July/August and two weeks in December. As most correspondence is via email, we are still able to provide reasonably prompt service to both international and national leaders despite the reduced opening times. Staff flexibility and willingness has been a major factor in enabling us to cope with the workload. For example, our Financial Officer, agreed to work longer hours during the first and last quarter when financial activity is heaviest, with a reduced schedule in the quieter quarters.

Streamlining of work at Headquarters, a process begun in previous triennia, has accelerated. Virtually every aspect of staff work has been examined with a view to finding efficient alternatives. A few of the changes over the three years include: the introduction of a time management tool to track and analyze the use of staff resources, the creation of a new database for dues management, the introduction of a billing system for dues payable to IFUW, on-line banking and payment options,

automated backup systems for office data and more effective presentation of programme information to reduce general enquiries. The introduction of a new functional budgeting system is providing the IFUW Board with a better picture of where resources are being used and how they might be shifted in the future to better serve the needs of the Federation. Because of the cyclical nature of many of IFUW's activities, such as the Conference and fellowships competition, it will be another two years before we have a fuller picture.

Emphasis continues to be on finding ways to reduce expenses wherever possible. The net result is that administrative costs (apart from the social redundancy payments to the staff members who left) have come in under the amounts budgeted by Council for each of the three years.

### **Support for volunteer leaders**

The nature of IFUW's volunteer roles is also evolving. In the past, a greater proportion of volunteer work was accomplished during the face-to-face annual meetings held in Geneva. With the availability of new communication technologies and decreasing staff resources, volunteer leaders are taking more responsibility for the actual implementation of programmes and tasks. Work that was once periodic is now continuous throughout the triennium. Committee members interact constantly via email and are taking on more individual assignments. Some bodies, like the Fellowships Committee, are now functioning exclusively via electronic means; others, like the Membership Committee, are experimenting with virtual meetings via conference calls. An important staff role over the triennium has been helping to facilitate this transition.

Electronic decision-making is not always easy given the diverse range of languages and cultural backgrounds, as well as practical constraints such as the differences in summer holiday schedules between the northern and southern hemispheres. The challenges are greatest for leaders for whom English is not their mother language. Many find written interventions far more difficult than oral ones. Most IFUW leaders balance their IFUW assignments with heavy professional responsibilities, as well as family responsibilities. Their availability does not always coincide easily with the timing of IFUW's work needs. Some leaders take part only sporadically in the on-line discussion and decision-making, others hardly at all. Finding consensus and completing assignments within reasonable time frames can be difficult. Staff members have been working with leaders to help meet deadlines and to establish protocols to improve the process.

While Board and Committees are increasingly corresponding directly with national affiliates, Headquarters remains an important clearinghouse. Having official requests for information come via Headquarters channels not only automatically reassures NFA leaders of their authenticity, but also ensures that there is a permanent, centralized record of any information returned. The challenge is how to make the institutional knowledge readily available to both international and national leaders. Staff members have helped create on-line forms and email addresses that automatically distribute information to the appropriate international leaders, while archiving copies at Headquarters. We have also taken the initial steps toward creating databases of existing information, for example on membership, accessible to leaders through the Internet. We have also been working to establish on-line reference materials specific to the different committees. All of this should be completed and ready for the next triennium.

During the triennium we have provided special support to meet the needs of specific committees. This has varied from the development of PowerPoint presentations, to technical assistance with the preparation of brochures and web material, to the development of on-line application systems.

While most of the logistical planning for Conferences has shifted to the hostess association, Headquarters continues to provide the conference website and other technical assistance to the Local Arrangements Committee, programme planning support to the Board, plus assistance with most of the constitutional components, from documentation and elections to constitutional amendments and resolutions.

The Board created two new working groups, an Editorial Group and a Marketing, Publicity and Fundraising Group, to assist with the work of the Federation. These are still in the embryonic stages and further steps are needed to make them an effective part of IFUW's leadership team.

### **Communications with national affiliates and members**

The financial crisis hastened IFUW's transition from printed to electronic formats. As of 2007, virtually all communications with NFAs and members are via email or the IFUW website. In lieu of printed send-outs to national leaders, circulars are posted on the IFUW website in a central location and a special alert is sent via email to national leaders providing a list and direct links to newly-posted documents. The advantage is that national leaders have continuous access to all of the documents distributed during the triennium. We are also making greater use of forms that may be completed and submitted electronically. As Internet access remains a problem in some parts of the world, NFAs encountering problems may still request or submit printed versions of forms and other documents. To improve accessibility, most official documents are provided in three electronic formats.

While new technology has made it possible for information from IFUW to reach a wider audience more quickly, ensuring that official information reaches the correct leaders within each NFA is not always easy. National presidents, CIRs and secretaries are automatically added to IFUW's official email distribution list. NFAs may request that other national or branch presidents be added. It is more important than ever that NFAs inform Headquarters immediately of any changes in their national leadership or their email addresses, so we can be sure that the information is reaching the right people. Too often messages are returned to IFUW because email addresses are no longer valid. When this happens, an NFA may miss out on an important opportunity or deadline.

The IFUW website is without a doubt the most exciting, versatile tool at IFUW's disposal. It is constantly being revised to make it more user-friendly and interactive. On-line forums were created this past year, offering members opportunities to meet other members, share information about their work, and discuss issues. The Status of Women Committee has already used the forums for two discussions related to the Programme for Action, on HIV/AIDS and primary education. Participation in the forums to date has been limited, because it is a new experience for many members. Promoting its use will be one of the key challenges for the next triennium. A new leaders section of the IFUW website ([www.ifuw.org/leaders](http://www.ifuw.org/leaders)), which is password-protected, will give national leaders easy access to upcoming deadlines, address lists and a range of resources.

The site continues to offer training materials and is now being used to highlight special initiatives in which national affiliates and members may participate. One example is the initiative encouraging members to organize activities on International Women's Day in 2007 around the theme of the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against girls.

IFUW also enables regional groups and national affiliates without resources to have a web presence, by hosting and updating their web pages and providing technical support and advice. Many groups, from the University Women of Europe to newly forming association in Rwanda, have taken advantage of this service.

We express special appreciation to our web consultant in the USA, Louise McLeod, who has continued to assist in the design and technical functioning of the website. Her expertise and friendship over the many years she has been cooperating with IFUW are highly appreciated.

### **International Advocacy**

While the Board Advocacy Liaison and the Status of Women Committee Advocacy Liaison are taking larger roles in the work of IFUW's teams of representatives to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and its subsidiary bodies, the International Labour Office and UNESCO, Headquarters continues to coordinate the official accreditation and periodic reporting required for continuing official consultative status. IFUW has applied to have its consultative status with ECOSOC upgraded from special to general status, which will give us greater direct access and opportunities for intervention. We are also investigating possible consultative partnership with the World Health Organization.

Special efforts have been made to enable increased coordination of advocacy opportunities at the international level by IFUW volunteers, in particular by circulating relevant information via the advocacy e-mail network and the national leaders network, encouraging interactive discussion on topics relevant to the mission of IFUW. Follow-up action at the national level is crucial to support and enhance IFUW's international advocacy.

### **Looking Forward**

It is impossible in a short report to mention the wide range of work carried out at Headquarters. Staff plays a supporting role in many of the activities cited in other reports to the Council.

The number of staff members is now very small for the scope of tasks required. Constitutional deadlines are being met, but other assignments are sometimes slower in completion than we would have liked. We are working to make adjustments and appreciate very much the cooperation and understanding of our leaders and members as we continue to adapt to the new circumstances.

As staff, we have the privilege to be in regular contact with IFUW members throughout the world, to be inspired by their energy and the enthusiasm we see in many places.

We realize that the picture is not all rosy. This remains a turning point for IFUW. Many of our older associations are dwindling at an alarming pace. Some members question the very need for an organization like ours. If IFUW is to survive this critical time, it is important that our members and leaders look to the future. We need to define what kind of organization we are going to be in the coming years and what IFUW will offer to potential members and to society. The IFUW Board is setting in place mechanisms to move in this direction, including the discussions on IFUW's future and the special orientation for new leaders in Manchester. The extended Board Meeting in November 2007 that has been added to the meeting schedule will also offer the new leadership an opportunity to meet together and set a common agenda for the next triennium.

As a staff, we have come through what has been a very difficult period. We have emerged ready and willing to accept the challenges of supporting IFUW in the new directions it takes.

Leigh Bradford Ratteree, IFUW Secretary General  
on behalf of the IFUW staff  
May 2007