

# NZFGW Triennial Report

2007 - 2010

## THE IFUW PROGRAMME AT NZFGW'S NATIONAL MEETINGS

The programme for action adopted at Manchester in 2007 for the triennium just ending, *Women: Agents for Change Building Sustainable Futures*, has proved a fruitful theme, focussing on women's role in achieving a balanced interaction between economic development, protection of the environment, social justice and human rights. It is very wide-ranging, however, and the **New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women (NZFGW)** welcomed the Board's decision to concentrate more sharply on the promotion of life-long learning for women and girls to be leaders and decision-makers. Nationally, at Mid-Term Council (early 2008) and Conference (late 2009), and locally, at Branch level, this theme has been outstandingly successful, both thought-provoking and practical. It has also been a feature of the triennium that IFUW's email communication with NFAs and on-line discussions on policy, initiated by the Status of Women Committee and relating to the programme, have reached new levels.

In *Creating Our Sustainable Future* our Mid-Term Council meshed the IFUW theme with New Zealand's own interests. Discussion on the future of NZFGW identified a need for greater cohesion in the organisation, through a national project based on and aligned with IFUW priorities, and enhanced communication. In a New Zealand-wide project, Branches are currently researching the impact in their areas of the slashing of government funding to Adult Community Education, with its potentially damaging effect on women's life-long learning. Structured interviews with institutions formerly providing evening courses, their tutors and class members will form the basis of a strongly research-based report and a submission to the Minister of Education. Communication among members has been enhanced by the well-designed and regularly updated NZFGW website. Branches also distribute the National Executive's newsletter electronically to their members where possible and Facebook has recently been set up for both Young Members and the growing number of Independent Members. Two issues of *Graduate Women*, both of excellent quality, have been published during the triennium.



*Delegates to Mid-Term Council, Hamilton 2008, share a lighter moment*

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*Outgoing NZFGW President Charlene Lutes welcomes her successor Dorothy Page. Conference Auckland 2009*

The Conference *Taking Effective Action* (at which the Northern Executive ended its term and a Southern one based in Dunedin assumed office) was a blend of the practical and the inspirational. International President Louise Croot urged us to use the IFUW Strategic Framework, national and international policy established by resolutions and the expertise of our membership to time our actions appropriately, advocate to the right people and always aim to raise the profile of

NZFGW. Dorothy Meyer and Jenny Strauss of the Status of Women Committee gave practical advice on translating policy into

action and a variety of speakers discussed such issues as the risk of regression for women's rights in difficult economic times, the need to consider redirecting our resources in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the effectiveness of mentoring. Other speakers, restrained in demeanour, nevertheless inspired us with their own achievements. We heard about women's issues in Tonga and were challenged to work out the best kind of partnership with our Pacific colleagues and to engage more fully with Pacific women living in New Zealand.

## ADVOCACY

Among topics we took action on were:

- **Women in Leadership and Decision-making:** The NZFGW PAC took part in a forum with the (then) Minister of Women's Affairs to discuss the Action Plan for New Zealand Women.
- **Women and political representation:** The low representation of women in the New Zealand parliament was an issue raised by the CEDAW monitoring committee. NZFGW worked through the National Council of Women of New Zealand to try and persuade all parties to increase the number of women candidates in the coming election.



*Before the rush: Joy Dunsheath sets up her outstandingly successful Hegg Hoffet sales table at Conference 2009*

- **IFUW Resolution 2: a High level Women's Agency for the United Nations:** NZFGW participated in discussions initiated by Pacific Women's Watch (NZ) and UNIFEM.
- **IFUW Resolution 4: Commitment to Millennium Development Goals:** A letter was sent urging Government to aim to reach the overseas aid target of 0.7% GNI before 2015.

- **HIV/AIDS early intervention programmes:** Following an NZFGW Conference remit, a letter was sent to the Minister of Health and Opposition Spokespersons on Health urging an immediate review of these programmes.
- **Intergenerational Dysfunction in Families:** Following an NZFGW Conference remit, and further research, a letter to relevant authorities is in preparation concerning this.
- **Loss of Community Education Funding:** a national project in progress.
- **Under-age Cultural Marriages in New Zealand:** A submission to the Justice and Electoral Committee was sent in support of Pacific Women's Watch (NZ)'s petition against such marriages.
- **Voluntary Membership of Students Associations:** A letter to the Education and Science Select Committee, in support of the students' stance that all students should be members.

In addition, Branches have made a number of submissions on regional and local issues.

### **NZFGW: STRUCTURE AND CHALLENGES**

Membership is our greatest challenge, both within the branches, where the membership is often aging and the numbers declining, and nationally, where we have had to oversee the deeply regretted closure of several branches. Since our last report Nelson, the Northland Associate Branch and Auckland (which despite a membership of well over a hundred could not find an executive) have closed. Hutt Valley is in process of doing so. Many members from these branches have become Independent Members, who now make up a substantial group, and we are working on ways - NZFGW Newsletter, Facebook, personal letters - to include them as fully as possible in our community. Declining membership also means declining income from dues and this, together with serious losses from investments in the economic downturn, has left us financially constrained. We greatly appreciate the donations to our fellowships and awards from Branches that have an income from regalia hire at graduations. Both in Auckland and Nelson charitable trusts continue to offer awards to women for tertiary study.

### **REGIONAL AFFAIRS**

As a member of Pacific Graduate Women's Network (PGWNet) NZFGW has participated in three meetings during the triennium, groundbreaking virtual Council meetings in 2007 and 2009 where, despite problems with technology, a great deal was achieved and a face-to-face meeting in Tonga in 2008. This was held in conjunction with the first conference of the Association of Tongan University Women, a truly memorable occasion. The constitution has been revised, the Regional Action Plan is being updated and in November NZFGW will have the honour of taking over from the Australian Federation the role of hosting PGWNet for the next two years.

Several members of NZFGW, including myself as president, as well as Louise Croot and Dorothy Meyer for IFUW, attended the excellent Australian conference in late 2009.

## BRANCH ACTIVITIES

Branch newsletters and emails describe a multitude of events. Many of the regular meetings reflect the IFUW priorities. For example, there have been speakers on enviro-schools, climate change and equal pay, a panel on the graduate gender pay gap and debate on women-only awards. Young women who had received awards from the branches have returned to give enthusiastic reports of their experience and research. There have been lunch meetings, mainly social, and special open lectures. Some branches, such as North Shore, have special-interest groups within the membership: a book group, a public affairs group, and a young mothers' group. Otago Young Members meet for casual lunches and, occasionally, family workday/picnics at environmental reserves. They also arrange an annual public lecture with a high-profile visiting speaker. Among Branch projects, Manawatu has helped provide books for children in hospital in Samoa and North Shore has investigated the introduction of National Standards in primary schools and written to the Minister about their concerns.



*A group at the Otago Branch Young Members' workday at Okia Reserve*

There is sadness in any triennium at the deaths of loyal and long-serving members of Graduate Women, but the loss of Dame Daphne Purves, the only IFUW president from New Zealand (1977-1980) until Louise Croot, deserves special mention. Her perception, powers of analysis and great charm lasted until her death, just before her century, and will be remembered by everyone who knew her.

*Dorothy Page*