

Speech Renée GERARD Jans GREMMEE award no 3

It is a **privilege** and **an honour** to receive this prestigious award.

I feel it is also a **link**, a tie with our forerunners in UWE, these great ladies who struggled to bring official recognition for University women on the European scene.

Jans GREMMEE a great leader from the Netherlands and also women from our national associations who collaborated closely with her and have now been forgotten .I want to pay tribute to two French members of AFFDU Maryvonne STEPHAN and Andrée SAVAJOL who worked closely with Ian to get UWE recognition by the Council of Europe VVAO through this award keeps alive the memory of their combats and for this VVAO must be congratulated

Looking back to my life and career , I see that **the road that led me to closer to IFUW then to UWE** meandered on different paths, all originating from abroad ,USA, Africa, Iran , India, Korea , Bangladesh . The odyssee, step by step and year by year brought me closer to the values and to the reality of the Federation and of UWE.

In the USA as a Fullbright **scholar** at the prestigious University **of Columbia** in New York, a new world opened to me. Contacts with a new culture (but also a cultural shock) being immersed in the American system of system of education, having to revisit my European values. I became a fierce **defender of Europe**, and a great admirer of the **scholarship system** that may open so many new avenues to foreign students and especially r women students However, it seems odd that during the three years I spent at Columbia, my alma mater, the very place where the founder of the IFUW, Virginia Gildersleeve was dean of Teachers College and an influent social and political leader, **I never heard about AAUW**, the American Association of University Women or of any other **University women association**

A strange gap in the collective memory

Around the world , my international United Nations career led me from West Africa to Asia in Ivory Coast and Togolad , South Korea , to Iran , to Italy and then to Bangladesh where being in charge of launching programmes for women I found myself being the only woman at a high post with 247 male colleagues , a world away from parity. I then experienced discrimination and the message I want to give to women involved in decision-making is that they should be ready for the hard blows that will come when you accede to responsibilities.

.In all these countries I had working relations contact with the universities and their professors women and men. In Abidjan I even took an anthropology course, in Korea I cooperated with the ladies from EWA university and so in Tehran. University

In Dhaka Bangladesh as senior programme officer for Women in Development , I got seven big projects off the ground .**One of them was a scholarship programme** for six women doctoral students who were sent to IDS Sussex (Institute of Development Studies)UK with the commitment to write thesis on feminist issues in Bangladesh another one, a micro credit project for women was a pioneer attempt launched simultaneously with what is now the famous Grameen Bank that deserved Mohamed **Yunus** the Nobel price .At that time we were struggling pioneers in that micro economic field .**Ela Bhatt** the founder of another bank for women SEWA (Self Employed Women Association of India) had neen my consultant

And then, in the subcontinent, I saw the light of the LAMP of LEARNING from IFUW

There is a saying; he light is coming from the East

To formulate my seven projects for women, I called upon consultants from different countries in different fields of activity (micro credit then a pioneer venture, income-generating activities, leadership development,) all calling for an EDUCATION component

My Indian women consultants introduced me to IFUW, its programmes for the advancement of higher education for women and they urged me to join

I was then living in Bangladesh. IFUW then had not formalized individual membership and I was referred to the French association .I took membership but being abroad it remained formal and I learned very little about programmes and activities

It is only upon my return I returned to France as Head of an international division in a Research and training institute that my contacts with my national association AFFDU became more significant and I became involved .

I was willing to give my international experience at the service of AFFDU, and I became CIR .The CER having resigned one year later, I cumulated the two posts of CIR and CER for five years.

I was still doing consultancies for the World Bank in Rwanda, for UNFPA in East and West Africa, but the post of CER brought me closer to the **European scene** and I made many new friends during UWE annual meetings that I have being following now for many years

Anchored in France, I kept one foot in the world, one foot in Europe.

At that timealso I **came closer to IFUW** having **been elected to CSW**, (Committee of the Status of Women) where I served for six years .My special task was to work on HUMAN SECURITY and my past international experience as well as my keen interest for environmental development allowed a documented contribution

At the UWE meeting **in Dubrovnik (2002)** I was elected **vice president of UWE** and in that new post also my ambition was to bring my experience to the service of the European University Women . In France I was a **board member of the French Coordination of the European Women Lobby** and when I was **elected to represent UWE at the Board of EWL** I was already well acquainted with their programmes and procedures .

I feel really as a citizen of my country France but also a woman citizen of the world and especially of Europe It is why, my friends women citizens of Europe I urge you to get involved in the EUROPEAN elections of 2009 .elections to the European Parliament but also elections to the European Commission There decisions are made that concern us directly and there Is no Democracy without PARITY

A last note

When I left Korea, the UN appointed two men to take my post.

In AFFDU, I held the posts of CIR and CER

Now that I am quitting the Executive of UWE, we talk about two vice presidents

There is food for thought .Is it my Karma to be worth double or is it my karma to create so much work that it should be divided when I leave.....it .