

Report on the 33rd Triennial General Assembly of GWI

I was privileged to have the opportunity to attend this event. In a way, I ran after that occasion. To be frank, after seeing all the discussions, misunderstandings about the money increase to be member of GWI for a couple of years now, questions about how GWI money was spent, I asked my daughter who lives and works in Geneva for 23 years working as a lawyer for the WTO to become a member of GWI or any Geneva's club (a kind of spy). So, she did (obeyed...). She gave me news on how big changes had occurred. At the same time, people over there got to know her and asked her to help them for the Triennial. Since she teaches at the same time at the Geneva University above her full time job at the WTO, she obtained the place for the Assembly. She invited 250 out of 400 participants to visit the WTO, have some speakers and a cocktail at the WTO. She participated too at a panel and received at her apartment the national presidents...

For me, it was a very challenging but inspiring experience because the program was built with great care and foresight by a handful of people- the recent Board, the Executive Director, and the Local Organizing Committee. All that without losing a minute. The subject matter was brilliantly connected and there was a lot for thoughts and discussions. It was not just about us as individual members and the present, but the globe and where we are going. To begin, when we arrived at Geneva we could see a symbolic flying of the GWI centenary on the Mont Blanc Bridge crossing the River Rhone from the Right to the Left Bank. It was very impressing to see the flags in the wind. I don't know how they obtained that from the city council but it was a good shot.

Tuesday evening, July 23

Gabrielle, hosted a very nice evening reception in her home two days before the Triennial Opening to welcome Presidents of NFAs (National Federations and Associations), CIRs (Chair of International Relations) and friends. We were about 40 from various countries. It was a marvelous opportunity to meet other GWI members from around the world, some of our CFUW delegation, and friends from past occasions. We could see colorful dresses. I noticed that some men (husbands or friends) were present at the cocktail and during the

whole days of the assembly helping and seeming very concern that everything was going the way it should.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly is fundamental to deliberations, discussions and decisions about GWI's membership, structure, governance and ongoing and future identity and purpose.

Over two days it met to:

- Receive reports from the Board and Executive Director concerning its work, budget performance, audits and overall accomplishments
- Hear from the Finance, Bina Roy Partners in Development, International Fellowships, Education and Membership Committees
- Discuss and adopt resolutions that reinforce GWI's policy positions
- Hear from our UN Representatives in New York, Geneva, Paris and Vienna
- Approve the budget for the next triennium
- And to welcome new Affiliates

There were 6 Business session. I will not resume them all.

1. Report on the Strategic Plan 2016-2019: President Geeta Desai

The Strategic Plan consisted of 6 Goals:

- Goal 1: Renew focus on Education Advocacy; become a leader in global and national advocacy for women's and girl's education.
- Goal 2: Increase Membership world-wide.
- Goal 3: Market to increase recognition of GWI as a credible 21st Century graduate women's advocacy organization.
- Goal 4: Develop funding sources and activities to financially stabilize the organization.
- Goal 5: Develop financial management practices that are user-friendly, transparent and support the range of needs of this organization.

Goal 6: Develop and institutionalize governance that supports the growth, sustenance and success of a 21st century women's membership organization.

President Geeta Desai spoke of the three strategic aspects of the Report that were so crucial for the survival of GWI during this recent Triennium:

- Advocacy and women's global relationship
- Relations with the NFAs and
- Financial Management

Financial

Management:

Financial management must be meticulous.

When the newly elected board took over in 2016, it had 2 months of payments left and the Hegg Hoffat fund of 100,000CHF. There was a question of the expenditure of the previous triennium. There were not enough funds to cover the layoff of the remaining staff. There were programs that had outstanding bills that had to be paid and there had been significant cash withdrawals. Each of the three previous years had shown a six-figure annual deficit. There were concerns about the pledge to the Clinton Foundation. This new Board took immediate action:

- it reduced the annual audit cost
- it re-negotiated the IT contracts to significantly lower rates
- Board members generously paid off significant debts
- Expenditures were made only by the unanimous decision of the Board
- Monthly expenses were reduced from 55K Swiss Franc to 22 Swiss Franc over the course of the Triennium
- A more cost-effective office was found, cutting rental costs by one third
- It acknowledged restricted funds were miss-used in the past.
- It agreed there were to be no cash transactions.
- It balanced the budget for the first time in 4 years
- In fact, in each of 2017, 2018 and 2019, there is a small surplus
- It has extricated itself from the \$7.2 USD million pledge to CHARGE and the Clinton Global Initiative.

Now with a surplus three years in a row, funds from other sources seem eminently promising.

In concluding, President Desai confirmed that the experience had shaped policies and practices for the good for the future of GWI.

Members present appreciated the stark facts that had been so clearly presented – time for much sober thought. All were most appreciative of the incredible efforts of the President, her Board and the Executive Director in the 2016-2019 Triennium. Their work and generosity were indeed phenomenal and resulted in the survival of GWI to this day. Although determined to go forward many in the room had lived through the history behind the course of events. Indeed CFUW among many other NFAs present had approved the decisions taken at the Istanbul Triennial that resulted in the Board actions at the time and which eventually led to the crisis faced by the new board in Cape Town. We were indeed grateful that the Board of 2016-2019 was able to act so decisively and with such skill to turn things around.

2. Overview of GWI's Financial Situation:

President Desai had included much financial information in her Strategic Plan Report as finance was an integral part of GWI's work and direction of the Triennium.

Report of the Treasurer, Katharine Strub, Swiss Association of University Women:

Due to the positive results of 2017-2019, GWI has restored the Restricted Funds, balanced the budget for the Triennium, has cash on hand, and “is looking into the future with a certain confidence”. Monthly expenses were reduced to 22,000 Swiss Franc from 55,000 Swiss Franc monthly in the previous Triennium. In addition to staff downsizing (please refer to the remarkable efforts made by the Executive director in her report), new vendors, and a smaller office, another significant cut was achieved by reducing travel expenses for the Board members and the Executive Director. The President generously chose **to pay all her own travel undertaken on behalf of GWI but NFAs cannot consider this the norm going forward.**

The Treasurer reviewed the Projected and Actual Budgets of the Triennium 2017-2019 and answered questions. She said she also predicts a comparable positive balance for 2019. In addition, she stressed now how all payments that go through GWI bank accounts require two signatures, and restricted funds will be shown separately every month.

Before closing Katharine mentioned the challenges faced. There is still a significant number of NFAs that do not respect the deadlines set for the payments of dues by the Constitution. GWI cannot fulfill its role without the members' contribution. The dues are to be paid on January 1 and at least 50% of the dues are to be paid by March 31 of the current year. Dues are paid retrospectively, that is for the membership of the preceding year. Treasurer Strub encouraged all NFAs to review their dues collection process to make sure that dues from the current year are collected from their members in the preceding year so that the payments to GWI can be made early in the year. She thanked us sincerely for our ongoing efforts in this regard. And those present could not help but be impressed and grateful to Katharine for her incredible efforts and skill this Triennium, and for the countless hours she, other Board members, and the Executive Director spent answering our questions and better helping us understand and deal with the crisis.

Report of Executive Director, Stacy Dry Lara:



This report was particularly of interest because it touches on all areas of GWI. It also helps us to better understand not only GWI's survival and evolution over this last triennium but gives us a glimpse at some of its invaluable work and hope for going forward.

The Executive Director worked with the Board to stabilize GWI financially, to improve membership relations, to increase visibility and to create an "impact-driven advocacy and communications program". Stacy worked to simplify budgeting and financial reporting while ensuring financial activities met professional standards and were easily understood.

She worked to form new strategic alliances and set long term goals that would address realistic achievements for GWI. With this has come a more intense focus on the uptake of the United Nations and its mechanisms, national governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society.

As had been reported, at the end of the last Triennium, GWI was in a grave financial situation. This reality forced the immediate dismissal of staff, leaving the Executive Director to assume the workload of 4.5 staff members. Operating under the immediate austerity budget and with a very dedicated and generous Board, a strategic plan for stability was quickly put into place. One urgent need was to increase help in the office. To do so Stacy developed partnerships with more than six universities that began a robust intern program. Since August 2016, GWI has worked with 24 interns coming from 12 countries. GWI also partnered with the Swiss government unemployment program designed to improve people's skills. Stacy was able to place at no cost to GWI, three professional women at different times, for up to six months, to help at the office. All three women have gone on to successful job placements. I share these facts as examples of the incredible creativity and ingenuity GWI has used to turn itself around. Both programs continue to provide temporary staff to GWI and exemplify GWI's mission to educate, empower and engage women and girls in advancing awareness and education rights. In addition in September 2018 Stacy was able to hire Clémence Mathiaud to work a 60% schedule.

Always closely in touch with its NFAs GWI was very sorry to lose Finland, Italy and Sweden but has added 6 new NFAs. In addition it has forwarded more than 100 membership referrals to NFAs. Also the Independent Member program has now expanded to 27 countries.

With reduced staff, automating processes has become critical to efficiency. NFAs can now securely pay dues on line and donations can be easily allocated. Internal procedures for Bina Roy Partners in Development and Hegg Hoffet programs have been streamlined.

Significant to the Board's austerity programs has been the relocation of the GWI office to a more affordable opportunity. The building used now is leased to qualifying non-governmental organizations and is nearer to the Palais des Nations where GWI does much of its advocacy work and closer to other NGOs for collaboration.

As Stacy concluded her report she shared a special motto of her father's who had been a NASA Test Astronaut. It was, "Failure is not an option." We can be grateful to her father. Stacy lived by this belief as she worked tirelessly, and with extraordinary ingenuity to help turn GWI around. Those of us who had the pleasure to be in Geneva learned first hand of the extraordinary work of a very few during the Triennium to put GWI on a sustainable course, now dependent on all members being able to move forward together.

To conclude GWI is highly visible now on all four UN campuses. Its active participation can also be seen in the NGO Committee on the Status of Women with leadership roles, the NGO Committee on Human Rights, the NGO Committee on Aging, and other gender networks

Arrangement between GWI and CFUW

Discussion was allowed to continue freely and President Desai handled all with firmness, wisdom and decorum. It was not easy. What had been her choice and yet she felt responsible for so many?

Many in the Assembly still asked how such an agreement could have been made without a decision of the General Assembly and felt it very unfair and unjust. Geeta answered each question with fact and reason and explained the Memorandum had only been signed a few days previously. Indeed, what was her choice? How

could she have risked the loss of the largest NFA with a membership of over 7000? What would its loss have done to GWI? It was a member from Great Britain who eventually calmed the situation and asked the assembly, sadly, what option did our President have?



It was not an easy moment either

for the CFUW delegation nor for Grace and Joy but they handled the situation with care and conveyed clearly the thoughts of their the end from the thanked Geeta

the divergent membership. In podium they sincerely and made much appreciated comments to both the President and the Assembly for their understanding, challenging as it was for all.



Workshop 11:25 – 12:35

Building Peace through Education of Heart and Mind

Joy Hurst, Grace Hollett, Brenda Robertson, Godelieve De Koninck, CFUW



CFUW President, Grace Hollett began the workshop with a brief introduction of CFUW, an NFA with 7383 members in 96 clubs across the country. It is governed by a President and 10 VPs - 5 regional and 5 with the portfolios of Membership, Finance, Advocacy, Education and International Relations.

The workshop then zeroed in on education and their being three types:

- Formal – Primary, secondary, college, university, vocational training
- Global – a distinct model of education promoted by UNESCO
- Experiential – personal life experiences

Godelieve De Koninck, CFUW International Relations Committee, then shared her remarkable journey to gain a formal education and how she continues now to help others. One value gained from a university education is leadership. One learns to set an example. It can get one out of ignorance, out of violence, out of subjugation, out of poverty. Once you are out, then you can get in! “If you think education is tough, try ignorance.”



Joy Hurst, CFUW CIR, then talked about the UNESCO model of education, the three conceptual dimensions of a global education:

- Cognitive:
 - Acquire knowledge, understanding and critical thinking about global, regional, national and local issues
 - Make the inevitable links between different countries and their populations
- Socio-emotional:
 - Develop a sense of belonging to a common humanity
 - Share values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity
- Behavioural:
 - Act effectively and responsibly at local, national, and global levels

The concept is summed up by Malala Yousafzai, “One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.”

Brenda Robertson, CFUW International Relations Committee, illustrated the third type of education, education through personal life experiences. Her story of teaching in Tanzania was fascinating. “You can leave Africa, but Africa does not leave you.”

The discussion that followed with members in the room was equally interested. Other concepts were shared:

- Education allows you to dare to be unique
- Education breeds confidence
- Education breeds hope
- Education breeds peace

One Nigerian member in the room was one of many children in her family but her mother always told her she was worth 20 boys!

SWISS CULTURE NIGHT CRUISE ON LAKE GENEVA

Geneva is a city of culture, history and beautiful scenery. Embedded between the Alps and the hills of the Jura, the French speaking city lies in the bay where the Rhone River leaves Lake Geneva, Western Europe’s largest lake.

Our evening event was to be a dinner and cruise on Lake Geneva on an authentic Belle-Epoque paddle steamboat, the Simplon. A perfect size for our group, we were able to mingle before dinner and then join friends for a lovely meal of gazpacho, chicken and delicious chocolate dessert. The only little problem. A real sudden shower that the boat could not absorb with lightnings, thunder, everything. So the rain came into the boat from the roof and the windows. The captain said calmly wiping the floor. « It is better that it come from those places instead of below. » Quite funny...

Conclusion

I really appreciated every moment of that event because mainly the atmosphere was one of understanding the other, listening respectfully, proposing solutions. There were some tight exchanges but something positive always came out. CFUW proposed some amendments on GWI resolutions. Some were not accepted but the important ones were. Some complained because there is no air conditioning at the University except in the auditorium. It was very warm...but

Beijing 25 +

In 2020, the global community will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). A five-year milestone will be reached towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 2020 is therefore a pivotal year for the accelerated realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, everywhere.

The sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women is planned to take place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from **9 to 20 March 2020**. Representatives of Member States, UN entities, and ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from all regions of the world are invited to attend the session.