**At the Crossroads of Education, Gender and Human Rights: the thought-provoking theme of our Graduate Women International Triennial in Cape Town, August 2016**

where I was one of 10 CFUW National delegates. The Triennial was stimulating, engaging, and an opportunity to better understand the potential and ongoing evolution of GWI.

Good evening!

To begin, a little background for any new members tonight, and welcome…

CFUW-Ottawa is one of some 100 clubs across the country that belong to CFUW, the Canadian Federation of University Women. CFUW is an NFA, a national federation and affiliation, of Graduate Women International, formerly IFUW. CFUW is one of 60 NFAs around the world. In addition to NFAs, individual members can belong to GWI. This is important especially in countries where there is no NFA. Together with the NFAs and individual members, our umbrella organization, GWI is represented in some 80 countries of the world. In 2019 with its respected heritage, it will be 100 years old, quite remarkable for a international women’s organization in today’s challenging world.

Now to Cape Town….the six day Triennial was divided into two sessions – the first three days, the General Assembly or the business of the organization, and the second three days, a conference, a dialogue presented by educators, policy makers, the private sector, and civil society, on the empowerment of women and girls through education to the highest levels. We were reminded first hand of the realities of the lives of women and girls globally, and how we might better work together to help them, and to specifically help them achieve the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goal 4, Education 2030.

While much innovative work is being done, more is needed, and GWI with active member participation and support, is well positioned to play a leading role.

As our conference unfolded, session after session addressed the theme of education, gender and human rights, and each being at a crossroads. But so too we learned was GWI. As President Catherine Bell confirmed in her opening remarks, quite simply, the money to fund GWI has run out.

In 2013, members at the Istanbul Triennial agreed IFUW was dying and drastic action was necessary. Delegates including Canada voted overwhelmingly for a plan to survive and evolve, a plan that was indeed carried out by the outgoing GWI Board. Today GWI is a much different organization in terms of transparency, programs and outside funding - but that for another evening.

The most anticipated discussion at the Cape Town General Assembly was the proposed dues increase. For the first time in decades, programme and project expenditure grew during the last Triennium; income also increased as a result of fundraising and gifts. But building a new brand takes time and, the potential resultant funds are slow coming in. In addition, there are no guarantees. More initiatives will be needed. That lack of guarantee for outside funding is why the dues are so vital to GWI. And yet the dues income has continued to decline year after year because of the continuing decline in membership numbers in our NFAs. In addition to membership decline so crucial to the GWI dues, the dues themselves have not been increased since 2005, a drawback for any organization.

At the Triennial, presentations from the GWI Board confirmed details in GWI Board minutes and reports posted for all on the GWI website over the last three years. At the end of the day it was very clear to everyone in the conference hall that GWI would not survive without a dues increase. The proposals presented to date had not been accepted and no new proposals had been offered. The question we were left to ponder overnight was simply, “Do we believe in the GWI cause?”

Some of us worked late into that night considering how we could possibly move forward. The next morning the first at the microphone was a petit but articulate Egyptian member who clearly and firmly began her eloquent comments with, “Ladies, there is no option.” There was silence in the hall. We had to come up with a solution. We worked together through the next several hours, over lunch, and into our breaks. Various proposals came to the floor. Intense discussion followed. The assembly finally voted with a large majority in favour of an increase of 10 Swiss Francs (CHF) in 2017, 6 CHF in 2018, and 6 CHF in 2019. The Canadian delegation supported the motion. But I hasten to add:

 1. There has been no change in the dues formula for NFAs. CFUW still gets a reduction because of its size, and it continues to start with the base of 15 CHF rather than 18 as with other NFAs sharing our GNI (Gross National Income).

 2. No CFUW dues increase can take place this fiscal year but can only be passed at our next AGM after written notice of any proposal to all Clubs 120 days prior to the AGM.

 3. GWI would be greatly diminished and possibly die without dues from CFUW, the largest NFA. If we do believe in the cause we need to work together over the next months to prepare for the next AGM and to help others better understand.

To put all in perspective what we are talking about is considerably less than the cost of a Starbuck’s white chocolate mocha once a month over the course of a year. I shall have a lasting memory from the Cape Town Conference Hall of the raised hands of women far less privileged than we but who voted overwhelmingly and without hesitation in support of the dues increase because of a vision they had for helping the women and girls in their countries. They deserve our support. I also share of the will and generosity of 2 NFAs, New Zealand and Australia, who offered on the spot to pay their dues in advance to help GWI with its cash flow until other dues come in. That’s the spirit we need!

Now briefly to other Triennial agenda items:

 1. The Resolutions – 6 out of the 12 resolutions presented were either moved or seconded by CFUW and they were all passed. They related to NFAs urging their own governments to adopt policy on a variety of issues.

 2. The new GWI constitution was approved. It incorporated several of CFUW’s prior suggestions. The outstanding issue of GWI adopting a parliamentary procedure will be looked at by the new GWI Board. The challenge is to identify one acceptable to all the NFAs. Robert’s Rules is not recognized outside North America and we learned is apparently considered illegal in some countries ie New Zealand.

 3. The election of the GWI Board 2016-19:
 Mrs. Geeta Desai, a member of Women Graduates-USA was elected President. I have known for some time. She will bring both a passion for women’s empowerment, and experience in organizational development and funding.

Finally, outgoing President Bell was thanked for her bold and intelligent leadership and vision, and our own Susan Russell, a retiring Vice President, for her passion, energy and remarkable contributions over the years.

This had been a challenging Triennium. I think history will prove it a turning point, and its leaders, women of vision and courage. In Cape Town, GWI was kept alive because informed delegates from around the world believed in the GWI cause, understood the stakes, and most importantly were willing to work together listening to each other to come to a workable solution.

 I come home once again knowing how blessed I am as a Canadian and how much our support is needed and appreciated elsewhere. It was a privilege to work at the Triennial with the other CFUW delegates, and indeed the international delegates. We now need to work together in Canada, listening to and hearing each other. We need to help our members better understand GWI, that they might become more engaged it its work and help shape its future, to ensure the survival of this remarkable international women’s organization, for at least another century.

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