

Good afternoon,

Thank you for your coming this afternoon, and Charlotte, for organizing this meeting and for your tireless efforts in continuing to lead our club through these tricky but very significant waters.

I hasten to say I hold no elected CFUW position.

However, I have been “around awhile” and built up a broad CFUW network of informed and caring members and leaders across this country. CFUW is traditionally a grass roots organization and we talk and write regularly.

The current National Board is working very hard and I thank them. Their task is not easy and some are greatly concerned. But ongoing open communications is key.

To begin I would like to go back to Cape Town and the 2016 GWI Triennial. The members of the CFUW delegation had been approved at the CFUW AGM last summer, and it included from across the country, 3 National Board members, and 7 ordinary members of which I was one. It had been tasked to vote against the GWI dues increase that had been proposed by GWI at that time, but to use its good judgment on any new information presented and then to vote after discussion, accordingly. All CFUW delegates voted and we voted as one solid block.

As a result of the decision made at the 2014 Triennial in Istanbul that Canada and the large majority of other NFAs voted to support, GWI was using reserves to turn itself around with a new brand, and an exciting new energy. Great progress had been made but it needed a dues increase to continue that momentum as it had not had one since 2004.

Day 1 in Cape Town had been bleak. The dues increase as proposed had been defeated, and no alternative had been offered. How could we proceed? On Day 2 in the quiet sullen hall the first speaker at the microphone was a little Egyptian woman who simply said, “Good morning, ladies. We have no option. ”

That day our work together on the floor at Cape Town was extraordinary as NFAs from around our globe worked bit by bit to come up with a formula a large majority could accept. It was truly an example of the power of women understanding the issues at stake and then working together for the international good. Yes, GWI's very survival depended on us raising the dues and members far poorer than Canada did not hesitate to approve the motion we had arrived at.

In my opinion the tragedy of the moment is that the reality and spirit of Cape Town was never communicated with our members when the delegates returned home. I wish you all could have been in that hall. The recent commemorations at Vimy reminded me of the vision of our founders, and that vision was very much present in Cape Town. We need to get beyond our own skins to understand that.

Charlotte asked me to talk today about our Skype communications last week which included members from across the country. It was a good discussion with many common threads and opinions based on research. We agreed the Stratford Club summed them up beautifully. I cannot improve upon their words and so I share.

“Question #1: Is a due’s increase just?”

Since 2004, CFUW has raised the National dues five times, almost doubling the amount – from \$37 to \$70 today. The portion of member dues that each of us paid to GWI remained stable during that same timeframe, at about \$13 - \$15 until the Swiss franc was allowed to float, and then the portion in 2015-2016 became \$21 because of the exchange rate with the Canadian dollar. In the same period, 2004 to today GWI/IFUW has not had any increase in dues. They are struggling financially at this time, and it is not surprising, given the reality of dealing with inflation and no change in income for 13 years.

Question #2: Is a Due’s Increase reasonable? (See graph)

When compared with other organizations that have an international connection, the amount paid **with the increase**, by CFUW to GWI is still very low. Our Club dues are lower than Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis and Zonta and the proportion of our dues going to the international level of the organization is a fraction (half or less) of the levels of the other groups. Keeping that perspective, it is far from unreasonable to increase the CFUW dues to cover the GWI increase. In order to reduce the size of the increase to cover the GWI dues, CFUW might do well to get the national budget under control. There are clear areas which could be managed better.

Question #3: Is a Due’s Increase Moral?

We as members of one of the most affluent, secure and developed countries in the world have an obligation to look beyond our borders and support resources for women in countries that are struggling with economic and social challenges. We are the largest member of GWI and a decision to undermine that organization by not paying the full fees or by withdrawing altogether will have a huge impact on its survival and potentially on the wellbeing of other NFAs.

GWI President Geeta Desai’s response to the question on our impact was:

“If CFUW were no longer a member, we would have to rework income and expenditures. And, our volunteers (Board and committees) would have to exponentially increase the number of hours that they commit to working for GWI as would the remaining staff. However, for us, the implications of losing CFUW as a member of GWI transcends the budget issue. It means losing the leadership of women who bring a unique point of view that is a balance of compassion, dedication to women’s rights, and clear-eyed common sense.

In the wake of disengagement in world affairs by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and its choice to concentrate on its domestic agenda, we believe that the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) is that uplifting presence that affirms to the rest of the NGOs that the only way to advance the right to universal access to education for women and girls to the highest level is to look beyond country borders, and that the collective power of women around the world will change the world. GWI losing this unique point of view would be the real tragedy.”

In a world that is increasingly destabilized, where women are vulnerable, and education is crucial we cannot choose to be insular and isolationist.

While some say that CFUW, having consultative status with the UN, can be just as effective independent of GWI, it does make a difference to have an international organization advocating on issues vital to women, and especially to be doing it jointly with women around the world, on an equal footing, rather than on their behalf. There is a significant difference between speaking WITH women from other countries, and speaking FOR them from a Canadian perspective without formal opportunities for collaboration or any accountability for representation.”

I would like to add another clarification here. Contrary to the Task Force Report, page 17, CFUW does not have representation at UNESCO, but rather at the Canadian Commission for UNESCO which is not the same. The Canadian Commission consists of representatives from Canadian organizations, ie unions, NGOs and educational institutions, who comment on proposals from UNESCO. GWI does have representatives, member volunteers, at United Nations venues, not only in New York but also in Paris, Vienna and Geneva. They monitor these meetings and develop relationships that enhance our Advocacy work because they are on the spot.

Quoting again from Stratford,

“Question #4: Is a Due’s Increase Viable?”

The CFUW Board is clearly wrestling with the survivability of CFUW, if dues are raised, but at the same time knows our numbers are falling whether there is a dues increase or not.”

As the graph just showed, the dues for our Club are below those charged by comparable organizations. When the amounts payable to GWI by CFUW are listed in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, we all blanch.” How can we afford to pay \$335,000? Not all our members understand, but when dues are due, CFUW should already have that money. (Prudent budgeting does need to take into account exchange rates.) They would have received it from you and me when we paid our membership last fall. It is not CFUW money but our money held in trust by CFUW to pass on to GWI as per our constitution and agreed timelines.

While other clubs suggest a broad range of dues increase from \$33 to \$40, it depends on whether the increase is handled in one year or over a period of years and whether members are expecting some of the funds to come from cuts to the CFUW budget.

Final quote from Stratford...

“The advocacy Committee moves that CFUW Stratford votes in favour of increases up to \$26 to meet the dues increase.

This is fifty cents a week – half an hour of parking downtown. Its lunch out for two: it's a new book: a coffee at Timmy's once a month; it's manageable for virtually all of us.”

I wish to thank Stratford for taking time to research their work so carefully and then for writing clearly and sharing their Club document with us so that we might better understand the key questions.

Charlotte has asked me now to look at ...

OPPORTUNITIES THAT LIE AHEAD

Dorothy has already suggested some and there are so many.

GWI/IFUW has not survived 100 years by folding from time to time in the face of financial challenges.

I believe CFUW has a vital role to play within GWI and I know I am not alone. The world needs GWI and GWI needs Canada. CFUW members are educated women who care about the world, and GWI returns for them simply cannot be measured in dollars alone. GWI is already in place and gives us legs. Let us move on.

Many of us have met phenomenal GWI members – well - look at this room! It was a privilege to meet more of these remarkable women in my GWI delegation to the UN in March– leaders in their own countries – the head of the English department at the University of Alexandria in Egypt, a Senior South African leader working now in an incredible situation in her country, a Nigerian member working to help the Boko Haram school girls, a New Zealander supporting our work with Afghan girl's education.

In meeting Dr. Samar in at the United Nations I learned that Afghanistan is looking for support as candidate for the UN Human Rights Council and for implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in their National Action Plan. Imagine the pride she had in sharing that with me. Afghanistan has made remarkable progress. We can work with the legs GWI gives us in other countries so they too can advocate with their governments to support the new Afghanistan.

And in Cape Town I saw GWI legs at work when I met members from the British Federation who said they had been inspired in Istanbul by our work with Afghan women and girls, and had worked hard with their clubs to bring two Afghan post graduate women to study in England.

Imagine what we could do working with women already in place in some 60 NFAs and 40 other countries, to say nothing of our complementing the efforts of our GWI UN Reps volunteering in Paris, Geneva, Vienna, and New York.

In closing I met with Grace Hollett, our National President in New York to thank her for her selfless efforts in taking on the presidency at this challenging time, and to share my concerns about Board communication with the grass roots. She promised the Way Forward Responses would be made available and they were. We are grateful for that but we need more:

- we need an open on line discussion forum like GWI has so that members can freely communicate with each other across the country to better understand each others thinking,

- we need the GWI voice at the AGM in Richmond. At the moment it is not on the agenda.
- It needs to be in the form of an invitation by the CFUW Board to the GWI President to come to talk about GWI's vision Going Forward and answer questions from CFUW members.

Perhaps the Ottawa Board could follow the lead of others as discussed in our Skypes last week and write to the National Board with this suggestion of inviting a voice fro, GWI. Time is of the essence.

We are a crossroads. We cannot let either CFUW or GWI die under our watch. We need to have the courage and imagination to rebuild together, to work collaboratively and to move on stronger and more united than ever.

Hally Siddons
CFUW-Ottawa
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