

IFUW Panel Discussion
CFUW AGM, the Inn at Laurel Point, Victoria BC, June 23, 2012
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I welcome this opportunity to talk to you about IFUW.

- Were any of you born outside of Canada?
- Have you have travelled outside of Canada?
- Do you have family members that live outside of Canada?
- Have **you** ever lived outside of Canada?
- Do any of you have a degree or qualification from abroad?
- Did you drink tea or coffee this morning– grown somewhere else!

International connections are everywhere. IFUW's global network links close to 400 independent members and 30,000 Club members in 62 countries representing all generations, all cultures, and all fields of study. IFUW's greatest strength is its multi-cultural, multi-talented membership, its breadth of vision, its ability to engage in interdisciplinary debate and to take concerted action.

IFUW seven regional groups are: Africa, Asia, South Asia, Europe, Central America, Latin America, and the Pacific. IFUW's two North American affiliates are – Women Graduates USA and CFUW.

IFUW reaches out to women and girls and to the poorest of the poor through its educational, economic and social justice policies. Its skilled volunteers have access to the United Nations system. Members of IFUW affiliates are in contact with their governments around the world.

In Canada, your dues entitle you to membership in your Club, your region, your Council, in CFUW and in IFUW with opportunities to participate at every level. To get full value for money CFUW members need to be engaged in what IFUW has to offer.

IFUW's mission promotes:

- Lifelong education for women and girls
- International cooperation, friendship, peace and respect for human rights for all, irrespective of their gender, age, race, nationality, religion, political opinion, gender and sexual orientation or other status; advocate for the advancement of the status of women and girls; and to
- Encourage and enable women and girls to apply their knowledge and skills in leadership and decision-making in all forms of public and private life.

And how did it all come about?

In **1918** Dean Virginia Gildersleeve of Barnard College, USA, Dr. Caroline Spurgeon from London University and Dr. Rose Sidgwick from Birmingham University

began work to found an organization to promote peace and understanding among nations, through friendship and cooperation between educated women.

CFUW was founded in **1919** so that it could join with women from USA and Britain in London to pass a resolution to found the new federation which would link women graduates world-wide. And they named it the International Federation of University Women (**1919**).

In **1920**, delegates from the United States, Canada, Britain, Czechoslovakia, France, the Netherlands and Spain gathered in London for the first international conference. CFUW's greatest expansion occurred in the aftermath of the two World Wars. The devastation of war promoted among members a strong sense of social justice.

Highlights

In **1924** IFUW set up its first Fellowship and established its headquarters in London. A Committee to work with the League of Nations was followed in **1929** by a Committee on the Legal and Economic Status of Women – specifically the international status of married women (Canadian women became persons in 1929). In **1935**, aware of growing persecution of Jewish women, IFUW revised its constitution to ensure, that *“No federation or association shall be admitted or retained...if it debar qualified women from membership by reason of their race, religion or political opinions”*. And in **1935** the Italian Association was the first IFUW affiliate “to be invited to disband spontaneously” by a fascist regime.

In **1936** IFUW established an Emergency Fund¹ to help university women deprived of the right to work, and sometimes, the right to live in their native countries. IFUW was dormant for the duration of the war, but in **1946** it created an Emergency Relief Committee. It renamed this fund in **1968** this fund to honour long-term convener **Mme Blanche Hegg Hoffet of Switzerland**, who raised money and distributed assistance during and after World War Two. It aids graduate women.

As the war dragged on women's voices faded. Then at the meeting in London in **1946**, news came in from all over Europe of martyrs and heroines and succour given to refugees and Jews, members sent to prison camps and displaced persons in their thousands.

In **1947**, IFUW gained the right to send a representative to all organs of the United Nations and in **1948** it received special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council – in recognition of its work. In spite of the proliferation of women's organizations it is the only organization that works to influence through education and advocacy and to promote access to higher education².

¹ later called the Relief Fund

² It has a long association with UNESCO

In **1970**, IFUW moved its headquarters³ to **Geneva** a neutral country with UN offices. In **1975**, it set up **Counterpart Aid** – now known as the **Bina Roy⁴ Partners in Development Program** which funds small scale development, giving affiliates in developing countries the opportunity to work on a wide-range community projects. IFUW volunteers share their expertise to make this possible. In countries where women and girls struggle for educational opportunities IFUW is greatly valued.

When the Berlin Wall fell, women from many liberated countries joined. It is possible that new affiliates may be established in Afghanistan and perhaps in Morocco. These women value IFUW's access to social justice through the UN system.

Participation

Any member in good standing may run for election to the IFUW Board and Committees at the IFUW Triennial meeting, the governing body of IFUW. **IFUW's Board** consists of one President, four Vice Presidents, and a Treasurer. There are two Assistant Treasurers – (one from Canada and one from Switzerland). IFUW's **Committees** are Resolutions, Fellowships, Status of Women and Membership. The two Canadians to become IFUW Presidents were Dr. Allie Vibert Douglas and Linda Souter.

IFUW's international advocacy focuses on education, peace and justice for women and the girl child. IFUW's representatives at the United Nations in New York, Geneva, Paris and Vienna are well respected and leaders among members of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative relationship with the United Nations (CONGO)

IFUW representatives advocate for the adoption and implementation of international agreements to protect and benefit all women and girls, such as the Beijing Platform for Action for the Fourth World Conference on Women, Take Action for Equality Development and Peace, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention Against Torture, United Nations Resolutions 1325⁵, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and more. The Government of Canada has made commitments to legislate change and report⁶ on these and many other UN instruments.

Advocacy takes place **in-country**; through CFUW's consultative status at the UN; through advocacy at the various UN agencies; and when countries report specifically on their UN Commitments⁷.

This May, through its consultative status at the UN, CFUW presented a statement on Non State Torture to the review body of the Convention on Torture in Geneva. The

³ IFUW only has **one very small office**

⁴ Named after a former IFUW President

⁵ UN Security Council Resolutions dealing with women, peace and security

⁶ Reports to the UN body dealing with that treaty.

⁷ To peace, women's equality, human rights, development goals and more

Committee on Torture offered to reference CFUW's statement as a legal document. IFUW supported our actions, and has long advocated against gender-based violence. This support paves the way for positive change not only in Canada, but around the world.

At the **June 21, 2012** UN Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Hillevi Perraudin, the IFUW UN representative in Geneva, read an NGO Statement on Non State Actor Torture, drafted by CFUW. This shows how IFUW supports and works with National Affiliates. Information about this intervention is available on at www.unmultimedia.org .

And in December 2011, CFUW asked the Government of Canada to include women in deliberations at the Afghan Peace Conference in Bonn. IFUW affiliates in Britain, Germany, New Zealand and Australia supported CFUW's efforts and contacted their respective governments. The German Federation managed to get a journalist accredited to the meeting.

IFUW Triennial Conferences can be anywhere in the world and are supported by the Board, Committees, volunteers, the local arrangements committee, with oversight through the President and the staff in Geneva⁸. Funding for such conferences comes from a variety of sources⁹ including registration fees.

The IFUW Triennial Program is a blueprint for action and advocacy. Conferences, seminars and workshops discuss global issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. IFUW members have numerous opportunities to make new contacts and friends.

Join IFUW Connections; the Advocacy; Environment or the Young Members' Network. Take part in on-line discussion groups; raise funds for IFUW Fellowships; the Bina Roy Development Program; the Hegg Hoffet Relief; develop a resolution to go forward to IFUW from Canada or link with an IFUW member when travelling abroad.

Trends:

When the United States withdrew, IFUW suffered a devastating loss in terms of intellectual and fiscal capital. Yet it acted swiftly and decisively to recoup, regroup and focus.

The office slashed costs, eliminated paper (and postage), cut staff to three part-time workers, and moved to smaller premises. It focused on electronic activities, developed and monitors its website and the young members, actions; advocacy;

⁸ IFUW only has ONE office

⁹ Examples would be funding from CIDA at the Ottawa Triennial Meeting to bring women to Canada to attend capacity building workshops (\$100,000.00); UNESCO to do a study on higher education; CIDA to do strategic planning workshops in Ghana and elsewhere. In addition, members pay registration for the conference

environment, working groups¹⁰ and Leaders' listservs. It produces on-line handbooks (Education and Advocacy). The IFUW Fellowships program uses an on-line application processⁱ. The current economic downturn has made currency transfers more difficult for some national Affiliates, and has slowed the rate of investment growth.

Today, IFUW reaches out through its programs and advocacy to attract younger women while it nurtures its current members.

IFUW's non-governmental (NGO) partners

First the big Five Women's Organizations (Five-O) worked with UNESCO on small scale development programs. This no longer exists, but IFUW still interacts with:

- International Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW International)
- International Council of Women (ICW);
- Soroptimist International;
- Zonta International

The **Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund** - an independent charitable international fund founded by IFUW members to support projects worldwide frequently helps to fund parts of the IFUW Triennial Meetings and has funded parts of IFUW Projects.

IFUW is represented at 15 different specialized United Nations agencies including UN Women, UNICEF, UNESCO, the ILO and more. IFUW volunteers at the UN centres enhance advocacy initiatives undertaken by affiliates.

Throughout the world IFUW members engage in self education, learning and advocacy. Like CFUW, IFUW is self-funded and it has a strong independent and unbiased voice.

In conclusion, IFUW has grown from a small beginning with its roots in the desire place education at the service of humanity, and establish a foundation for peace, to an organization of which we can be proud. Our money is well spent, and its reach extensive. I urge you to look at the IFUW website for more information. www.ifuw.org

Until women achieve full equality, we need strong, articulate and educated voices to speak out. Where-ever women and girls lack access to education; are victims of violence; go to bed hungry; suffer the impacts of climate change and live on the margins of society, IFUW and its member affiliates are catalysts for positive change. Study without action is futile and IFUW offers the opportunity for both. Through our membership in IFUW we are all agents for change.

ⁱIFUW members awarded over \$2 million in Fellowships, Scholarships and Awards this year.

¹⁰ The Girl Child etc