

From: Graduate Women <gwi@graduatewomen.org>
Sent: January-17-17 7:12 AM
To: Graduate Women
Subject: President's Letter

President's Letter - 17 January 2017



President's Letter

Dear GWI Family,

I wish you a happy and peaceful New Year.

I wrote to you in December but since then it has become apparent that my letter should have been clearer.

Therefore, I am writing to you, once again, to provide context for the GWI Board's most recent decisions and to further clarify. I hope that you will see this letter for what it is – an attempt at setting the record straight and absolute transparency between the Board and Membership.

Background

As you know, at our 2016 General Assembly (GA), we were informed that the reserve was spent and that the remaining funds could cover staff and other office expenses for two months.

Upon closer examination of the financial situation, we realized that we did not, in fact, have funds to support the office and staff for two months as there were a number of extraordinary accrued staff and program – related financial obligations that would have to be fulfilled during those two months and beyond.

We debated the matter at length but it was clear that the Board needed to make the wrenching decision to lay off two staff persons. Although we continued to pay them for two months in adherence to Swiss Employment Law, honor previous contractual agreements with vendors and pay off the extraordinary financial obligations, we were able to reduce the monthly budget from approximately CHF 56,000 to approximately CHF 26,000.

Local Fundraising

Staff worked hard on local fundraising activities, the proceeds of which paid off the program-related accrued financial obligations.

Australia and New Zealand

I have been remiss in publicly recognizing the contributions of Australia and New Zealand. Australia and New Zealand kept their commitments, made at the GA, to pay their dues early and inclusive of the increase. The GWI Board recognizes the leadership of both NFAs.

The generosity of Board members and support from Australia and New Zealand allowed us to reach several milestones during October. We were able to: advocate against the rape and early marriage of girls, violence against women, Female Genital Mutilation; make statements at the UN on Indigenous People and CEDAW; submit a Policy Update on Gender Disaggregated Data; maintain distribution of the bi-monthly Update and monthly InFocus publications; submit three press releases; continue weekly social media campaigns; conduct a couple of webinars; provide project assistance to the Rural Futures Project and begin planning for CSW 2017.

GWI remains indebted to the leadership and members in Australia and New Zealand.

NFA Relationships: Throughout September, October and November, we continued to receive emails and telephone calls from our NFAs. While the calls and emails contained the common theme of faltering country economies and their inability to pay the increase, NFAs were also calling/writing to apprise us of their 1) decisions to leave GWI, 2) fears of losing members in droves, 3) feelings of being distanced from GWI's financial decision-making.

Many NFAs asked us to justify the increase. We provided one NFA with 36 pages of information in response to a total of 34 questions that had been raised by its membership. We were happy to comply with all requests.

Board Meetings: The Board met via Skype every month and face-to-face once in Geneva at its own travelling, lodging and boarding expense. Every meeting was consumed in a deliberation of GWI's financial situation, payment of accrued financial obligations, NFA relationships and the best way forward. The impact of the dues increase was discussed at every meeting.

Dues Increase: In August, 2016, GWI's General Assembly voted to incrementally increase membership dues.

By December, 2016, 32 of the 60 NFAs had decided that they could not pay the increase and would rather leave (albeit reluctantly). Applying the increase without further consideration would have meant that of the approximately 18,000 members, we would lose between 10,000 and 15,000 members, leaving us with approximately 8,000 to 3,000 members plus 124 individual members world-wide.

Since economic uncertainty and financial duress were common reasons cited by all NFAs, we thought it appropriate to invoke GWI Constitution Article X, paragraph 10, that allows for the waiving of dues in the event of currency fluctuations. This provision is prescient in that it was probably written before the advent of an interconnected global economy, globalization, the refugee crisis, ubiquitous wars and internecine conflicts and terrorism that would keep currencies world-wide in a state of flux and result in weaker economies in most countries. At this time of global economic uncertainty, we invoked this provision with regard to the increase only.

For those of you who still believe that the auditors will close us down without the increase, we have checked and they cannot. Auditors report to the GA and only the GA can shut us down. Neither did they say they would nor do they intend to. They tell us that they were cautioning us about the danger of continuing to incur expenses that far exceeded income and wanted us to make some common sense financial decisions that could either cut expenses or increase income. We have cut the monthly budget to less than half and are trying to find common ground with you regarding income.

The GA Vote:

Although a majority of the GA has had second thoughts about the increase, the vote still stands. **We would just like to give some thought to implementing the increase without losing 80 % of the membership.** We have the utmost respect for the Constitution but also understand that the role of the Constitution is to provide rules to further organizational mission – not to dismantle it.

Since the GA voted for an increase and the GWI Board cannot overturn the GA's vote, all the Board has done is defer the increase. At this point, I hope that our purpose in deferring the increase is self-explanatory.

However, I also think that it is unreasonable to think that GWI can sustain itself for multiple years on its current threadbare budget. The deferral of the increase can hopefully provide the time and process to build common ground: for you to plan for an increase, for the GWI Board to review all financial practices, and for all of us to build consensus around this issue.

A Proposed Way Forward:

We are actively looking for solutions to this existential dilemma.

I am of the opinion, that our membership should not view GWI exclusively through the lens of the dues increase. Nor should all our transactions boil down to this one argument. GWI represents so much more than that.

We know that neither the global economy nor individual country economies are projected to improve in the foreseeable future. And while the constitutional provision does not set time frames, we believe it is imperative to have a dialogue about the increase that does not, once again, raise the specter of a mass exodus, can build consensus around this issue, and determine how GWI can rely on its payment.

This is a very serious matter and in keeping with its gravity, I would like to bring together an Adhoc Committee of GWI members representing our small, medium and large NFAs and the northern, southern, eastern and western hemispheres who can thoughtfully discuss this issue and help us all get beyond the current impasse.

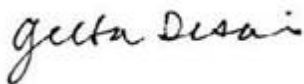
We believe that solutions developed by representatives of the membership stand the best chance of being successfully implemented within the membership.

You've talked about feeling distanced from GWI's decision-making. This is your opportunity to become involved in critical organizational decisions. GWI is our organization; we should all take ownership of its future.

If you would like to serve on this short-term committee, please let me know.

In the meantime, the GWI Board, staff and committees will continue to provide the full complement of benefits even as they prepare to roll out additional services.

Sincerely,



Geeta Desai

President, Graduate Women International

Graduate Women International

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