

News Line 15

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Message from the Chair

The terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11th were a terrible act against humanity - not just terrorist acts, but a crime against humanity. These attacks were unacceptable and the perpetrators must be punished.

Innocent people who were going about their ordinary daily lives were buried in fiery rubble. The North American continent lost its innocence. There has not been a war on the North American continent since the late 19th century. That is, until September 11th.

Now the United States and their allies are at war with terrorists: the Al-Qaeda network and the Taliban, in particular. In Afghanistan, innocent civilians will once again be killed, there will be more children orphaned, and more people to feed: "collateral damage"



Gandhi once said if we go ask for an eye for an eye, then the world will go blind. Indeed, the West has gone blind as a result of a heinous deed committed on our North American continent.

We must work to overcome this temporary blindness and build a new age of light and tolerance.

This is a time when organizations such as the INLW, have vital roles to play. I believe we have a responsibility to communicate with each other: so that we each can learn about what is happening in other parts of the globe - more communication will help to lift barriers.

At this time the management board of INLW needs your help in strengthening our organization. You can help out by:

1. sending articles about what is happening within your organization and to women in your region;
2. organizing more women to join the INLW; and,
3. providing us ideas of what you think the management board should be doing on your behalf

If there ever was a need for an organization like ours, it is now. Let us all work together to understand each others' challenges and remove the root causes of poverty in the world.

*The Honourable Mobina S.R Jaffer
Q.C., Senator
Chair- INLW*

Message from the Acting Secretary

This year the International Network of Liberal Women celebrates the tenth anniversary of the decision to found a network of Liberal Women "open to Liberal women members of parties, organizations and groups, and to individual liberal women". This decision was taken in Helsinki by women representing eleven countries in Europe, America and the Middle East.

At the 1990 LI Executive Meeting in Budapest permission to create a Women's Group was granted. The development of INLW has not been easy since 1996 when the first committee met to write its constitution and to request membership of Liberal International.



In November 1997, on the occasion of the Liberal International Congress in Oxford, INLW was accepted as Observer at the Administrative Session. However, it was not until 1999, during the LI Congress in Brussels that INLW gained its member status.

The first coordinator of the network was Swedish MP Barbro Westerholm. Marie-Thérèse Bianchi, Elizabeth Brandenburg, Tina van den Stroom, Elizabeth Sydney and Mobina Jaffer formed the founding committee. At the Ottawa Congress in 2000, a new management board was elected with Mobina Jaffer as Chair, Marie-Thérèse Bianchi as Secretary General, Eve de Roo van Alderwerelt Hoog as Treasurer, and myself as Vice-Chair.

Sadly, Marie-Thérèse Bianchi passed away in November 2000. As an emergency measure, at the Andorra Committee Meeting in February 2001, it was decided that I would become the Acting Secretary General. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the enthusiasm and depth of her commitment to INLW.

In the face of the contemporary challenges of globalisation and the structural changes at social, technological, political and cultural levels, women's participation is paramount in order to attain sustainable development, dignified life conditions for all individuals, and peace. Women should take part in the design of the future of society by asserting their right to participate in decision processes and their presence in private and public institutions, and thus confront the challenges of the contemporary world.

INLW must continue its history of asserting liberal women's rights by helping to develop women's awareness of their personal rights and political responsibilities. INLW must therefore work to increase liberal women's participation in politics at local, national and international level, as well as to strengthen relationships and exchange of information between liberal women world-wide by promoting access to information and education. Lastly, INLW must encourage the spread of liberal ideas from the point of view of women's experience.

To promote women's participation in liberal associations several strategies must be pursued, in particular gaining the support of liberal governments for INLW's application for UN participation in our own right and getting involved in local, national and supranational programs and institutions. These strategies must be pursued by each of the parties affiliated to INLW.

In this month of September I will be attending the 54th Annual DPI/NGO Conference at the United Nations, as representative of the LI. During this visit, I hope to advance INLW's application for NGO status.

The Catalan Group of Liberal Women is currently developing a new INLW website which we trust will assist in advancing our strategies. The new INLW website was presented at the Andorra meeting on the 9th of February 2001 and approved at the Board Meeting that took place in London on the 21st July 2001. The new website will present information about the organisation's history, aims and objectives, structure, news, useful links, and so on. It will also feature a forum and an intranet that will foster increased member's communication and provide a framework for working parties. Moreover, it will offer international courses on-line specifically addressed to women. We have also set up a data-base of INLW members and sympathizers.

In order to foster participation from liberal women in South-American countries, I travelled to México in May 2001. I was delighted to ascertain the interest of Mexican liberal women in the INLW. Furthermore, we are also preparing a Manifesto about liberal women contribution to good governance.

The drafting of the INLW Manifesto aims to be truly participative involving all women who wish to take part in it. Its first draft will be presented in October 2001 in Copenhagen for discussion and sent to members for their contribution. We aim to approve and present the Manifesto at the LI Budapest Congress in March 2002.

I would be pleased and honoured to know that I can count with your support of INLW's causes and increased international presence.

*Sra. Joaquina Alemany Roca, MP
Acting Secretary INLW*

Report on the Annual Meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women New York, 6-16 March 2001

The UN Commission on the Status of Women held its forty-fifth session from March 6-16 2001 at

the UN Headquarters in New York.

INLW was represented at the meeting by Jeannine de Bocard, Management Board member, Blossom Sanders, deputising for Mobina Jaffer Q.C., Chair, and Elizabeth Sidney, Special Adviser. Jeannine attended throughout and Elizabeth and Blossom for the second week. This year, CSW debated:

1. Women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS
2. Gender discrimination and all forms of intolerance

The debates on gender intolerance confirmed continuing grave violations and persistent discrimination against women in many countries. The CSW report was generally accepted apart from Iran's proposal to delete the reference to domestic violence.

The CSW, urged by ECOSOC, further adopted a multi-year programme for the years 2002-2005 as part of its aim to develop a more focussed approach. It is to consider how to improve its information to NGOs, make its papers more readily available and improve cooperation with other UN bodies. These are all important and very welcome developments which will enable NGOs to plan ahead for the CSW annual meeting.

INLW was permitted to attend in view of our accreditation to the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995) and to Beijing Plus Five (New York 2000) and our application for consultative status with ECOSOC (submitted May 2000). We are also permitted to attend as a member of Liberal International, which has consultative status with ECOSOC.

Blossom and Elizabeth spent some time at CONGO offices and at the British Mission to the UN, pursuing INLW application for independent accreditation with ECOSOC. Limitations in our May 1999 application were corrected with their help and our revised application went to the ECOSOC May meeting with British support. Unfortunately, it was not considered due to lack of time, but will be taken in either January or May 2002.

With independent accreditation INLW can become a full member of CONGO (we are currently an Associate Member) and can then contribute to the international committees and to CONGO representations to the United Nations. CONGO representation is of course much more powerful than representations to UN from individual NGOs or even NGO National groups.

There appeared to be a rather less sympathetic attitude towards NGOs at this year's meeting than we have so far experienced. It reinforced the importance of joining CONGO. Also, once again it was clear that INLW needs to take a well-designed and printed leaflet to the CSW meetings, if we are to publicise our work effectively.

A theme for the CSW Meeting in March 2002 will be women's poverty. INLW members are asked to send any national or regional reports they have on the subject to Elizabeth (email: mantra@psilink.co.uk; fax: 0044 20 7609 9447).

Elizabeth Sidney
INLW Special Adviser

Afghan Women React

The Afghan Women's Organization condemns the destructive and senseless violence perpetrated by those responsible for the attacks. Such violence is not condoned by any religion or culture, neither by Islam, nor by Afghan culture.

However, we are concerned that even more innocent lives will be endangered in the process of punishing the guilty as the American government threatens to commence a military attack against Afghanistan.

For the past 22 years, Afghans have been caught in struggles between powerful groups, whether superpowers or warring factions. Afghanistan was under Soviet occupation for ten years, during which western countries led by the U.S. and Pakistan armed and supported groups opposing community rule



to fight the Soviets.

Once this was accomplished these groups split into warring factions until the takeover by the Taliban in 1996. Over two million civilians have lost their lives during this time and there are at least 50,000 widows in Kabul alone, who rely completely on humanitarian aid. Civilians - particularly women and children - have lived without security, amidst violence and fighting between several factions in a war that has been forced upon them.

The human rights violations of the Taliban have been widely documented, particularly their war against women; however, Afghans have long suffered extreme human rights violations under previous regimes as well. Furthermore, the infrastructure of the country is already destroyed and more recently the population has suffered from natural disasters such as draught.

Afghan civilians and refugees had no role in inviting Osama bin Laden to Afghanistan and should not be punished for the heinous crimes of a select few, particularly when the population has already been suffering under the Taliban. The vast majority of Afghans are strongly opposed to bin Laden's presence in Afghanistan and only want peace.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported earlier this year that Afghans constitute the highest refugee population in the world, estimated at nearly 4 million. The threat of a U.S. attack on the country has further escalated the severity of the humanitarian crisis.

The Afghan Women's Organization expresses its appreciation and gratitude for the humanitarian aid which Canada and the United States have provided to innocent people in Afghanistan. Taking into account the current crisis, the Afghan Women's Organization suggested that the following actions would be most effective:

1. That the United States and its allies, including Canada, take every precaution to protect the lives of innocent Afghan civilians, who have already suffered under past regimes and, most recently, under the Taliban.
2. That the United States and its allies use their advanced technology to bring to justice only those directly responsible for the attacks.
3. That the Canadian government maintains its humanitarian policies by continuing to provide asylum to refugees and by increasing the levels of refugees resettled to Canada, particularly as crises in the countries such as Afghanistan worsen.
4. That Pakistan and Iran open their borders to Afghan refugees, who are kept hostage by the Taliban, so they find a safe haven in these countries.
5. That the alliance between Western and Islamic countries against terrorism be strengthened to ensure that the implementation of the human rights of the women and children of Afghanistan is a top priority in any intervention in relation to Afghanistan.

*Adeena Niazi, Executive Director
Afghan Women's Organization*