



# WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL CLUB

## DELHI

### Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at the Ashok hotel on 6 May 2009,

3:00 pm

The meeting was adjourned to 3.15 p.m. by the President, Ms. Smita Divan, as the quorum was not present.

#### 1. **Welcome:**

The President, Smita Divan opened the AGM with a welcome to the last meeting of 2008-2009.

#### 2. **Approval of the Minutes of the AGM held on 7 May 2008:**

The Minutes of the AGM held on 7 May 2008 at the India International Center were approved. It was proposed by Vinu Baig and seconded by Gita Kapurthala.

#### 3. **Presentation of Reports:**

##### • **Report of the Hospitality Chairperson, Ms. Miran Lee:**

Miran expressed her great thanks to all the members for their gracious support and smooth operation for this year. She especially thanked all who offered venues and food for the General Meeting and circle meetings which she found very generous and touched her personally.

Miran noted there were about 50 members who offered their homes as venues this year, and handed over the list to the 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President 2<sup>nd</sup> and Vice president. She knew not all of them could be utilized. The first few months were the most difficult for Miran as she tried to figure the exact attendance for the GM and circle meetings in part due to the influx of membership, however with time it became smoother.

Miran stated that some members did not turn up to meetings after booking which can create a lot of panic for the hostess and organizers. Also, some members had sent their reply cards very late. She received one last week for April's programs. Miran said she hoped it would not happen for the new committee.

As far as arranging food for the General Meetings Miran said she only had to do so three times. They were for the General Meeting in September, October and the committee members provided the food for the April General Meeting. The cuisine circle was kind enough to arrange the Christmas tea. In conclusion, Miran expressed her best wishes to her successor, Tania Rabin and the new committee.

##### • **Report of the Newsletter Editor, Ms. Seita Vaidialingam:**

Seita said the position of the newsletter editor was more than an eye opener. She was not ready for the 24/7 tasking that the computer held for the position. The position needs someone who knows the computer well. Seita felt she came into it with her eyes closed and bit off more than she could chew. Seita apologized for the first newsletter that was printed, with all the mistakes it had in it. Emma Horne then became the final proof reader for the newsletter. Seita thanked to Emma from the bottom of her heart, and she would never forget her help.

committee is leaving behind a sum of Rs. 116,360.72 in the month of May 2009. This is after all payments have been made. In addition to this, 3 of the fixed deposits Nos. 31417783; 31417798 and 31417745 would all be maturing on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May, 2009. The total maturity value of all three fixed instruments will be a total of Rs.199041.81.

Vibhuti thanked Ms. Seita Vaidailingham for extending her support by offering her office to help send out the balance sheets to members. She also thanked Janet for helping out with club letters and paperwork, Frenny for sound advice where needed and Miran for her hospitality.

In conclusion, Vibhuti thanked her predecessor Kanwarani Sohinder Nabha who guided her in all financial matters that needed an opinion. She then wished her successor, Sunandini and the committee all the best for the coming club year.

- **Report of the Secretary, Ms. Janet Kowall:**

Janet thought it had been an interesting year. It was a great learning curve, which gave her a better appreciation and insight as to what India has to offer. She wished Shree Devi Singh and the new committee all the best for next year.

- **Report of the Second Vice President, Ms. Lakshmi Chandra**

Lakshmi stated that it had been a pleasure to serve the members this year, and she tried to bring a diverse mix of programs that included music, dance and history from India's rich heritage.

Lakshmi thanked her hostesses: Sunita Kohli, Anita Meattle, Mechtild Van Der Lugt, Anup Singh and Shireen Paul. She had a special thank you to Bubbles Suneja for giving the club a great venue for the gala.

Lakshmi said she thought it would be wonderful if more of the international members would step forward and offer insights to their home countries. She felt in doing that the club truly becomes a forum of cultural and social exchange.

- **Report of First Vice President, Ms. Mandy Cunningham**

Mandy opened by thanking the thirty plus circle leaders who gave the club so many interesting and entertaining programs throughout the year. It was due to their hard work that we as members had been able to enjoy so many events. Mandy also thanked the members who opened their homes and provided snacks.

Mandy said the reason she joined WIC was in part to find new friends in the expatriate community, but mainly it was to build friendships with women from India. She felt it was something she was able to do this year by being a committee member. She urged the new members to also get involved.

Mandy felt one issue she experienced this year was the persistent no-shows. There were about a quarter of those who signed up but did not show up. Mandy said looking through the signup sheets it was not any one group of persistent no-shows, and most of us seem to do it from time to time. She asked that the members not try to do this as it results in disappointment for the circle leaders and irritation for the hosts who have gone to some lengths to provide snacks.

Mandy then highlighted some of the circle meetings. She began with the Book Circle. Mandy said it gave her great pleasure to have authors who discussed and read from their books; Rosewitha Joshi, Abha Dawesar and Urmila Sahay.

Mandy noted that the Cuisine Circle brought us events almost every month. Mandy gave Leena Singh a special thank you since her partner could not be here for most of the year. She also thanks Karin for stepping in to help.

Art & Culture- which gave the club magical moments; through Uzbekistan; learned about the art of Meenakari - enamel birds - world heritage sites and Kashmir shawls. There was also a piano recital, which was praised by all who attended, by our own Ariane Grey Hubert.

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Dance Away, which Mandy noted was close to her heart was a group that was started by last year's committee, continued very enthusiastically and culminated in a short performance at the gala. Mandy said that Dance Away and Hindi Bolo are two circles which didn't follow the standard pattern of WIC circles. They both seemed to involve a small core of people who were very enthusiastic and end up meeting much more often than once a month. Mandy said that Bina's Hindi Bolo classes have on the occasion stretched into Hindi conversation over lunch.

Lunching Out also provided an opportunity for club members to spend more time getting to know each other, as well as eating! For a second year Bindu Talwar and Niti Judge led us to discover new eateries. Many highlights included the visit to our own Mi Ran Lee's restaurant at the Ashoka Hotel. Dining out has been a great hit, since it is one of the few opportunities for our husbands or friends to join the group which included Karim's Old Delhi.

Emma and Gugu Delhi Discoverers took a group to Suraj Kund Mela, discovered life around New Delhi railway station as seen through the eyes of former street children as well as the underground Wellness Well – an underground spa under construction.

The Focus Circle began with the issue of domestic violence, then followed with a talk on Social Corporate responsibility and a discussion on the Panchayat Raj. They also brought us the most beautiful presentation on silk weaving represented in Saris from around the country.

Close Encounters, which was an idea revived by Nima Malhotra started the year with a lively discussion on what brought you to Delhi. Despite the fact that many people had known each other for years, all present seemed to be learning something new. If the circle group continues, Mandy strongly encourages new members to attend.

Health and Fitness was another idea from a member – Shakuntala Dawesar. It started with nearly 30 members doing Sun Salutations in the beautiful entrance hall of the Swiss Embassy. The talk on Alzheimer's was so heavily subscribed that Shakuntala kindly agreed to do it a second time.

Unfortunately, this group lost one of its members as Kaite Behrens left India earlier than expected. Mandy said Maria Polychronides who was going to organize philosophy circles was posted much earlier than expected.

Trips and travel organized a visit to Mount Abu which by all accounts was a huge success, with visits to many wonderful temples as well wonderful wining and dining!

Movie Circle did a remarkable job. Niru and Darshi brought us movies which made us laugh and cry, sometimes at the same time. These ladies have been bold enough to bring us everything from Mama Mia, to the challenging Black Book and Between the Lines, about the Hijra. Mandy asked if movie circle continues next year to please be a host if you have a large TV screen.

Mandy closed by saying very best of luck to Zakia Zarir and next year's committee.

- **Report of the Membership Chairperson Ms. Frenny Billimoria**

Frenny gave a very witty and vivacious report. She and her committee made it their mission to pick up the foreign membership. Last year the membership stood at 149, with 90 Indian and 59 foreigners. This year the membership stands at 155; with 90 Indians and 65 foreigners. She thanked the robust diligence of Shawn Runacres, Gugu Singh, Vanetta Podewils and Sohinder Nabha for bringing in 33 new members. Frenny said the new members are from Chile, Turkey, Italy, Portugal, Holland, Tunisia, Singapore, Britain, Germany, Canada, Argentina, Switzerland, America, France, Ukraine, and Lesotho, along with 7 new Indian members.

Frenny said since there was a large number of new members her committee changed the format slightly. Instead of coffee mornings they had lunches / brunches where not only did the new members get a chance of meeting the Executive Committee – but to meet each other in a great spirit of

bonhomie. Many of the new foreign and Indian members are accomplished musicians and artists, professors and doctors, businesswomen and home makers. This covered all age groups because it is not age but observation that brings in wisdom, different cultures but similar in our principles, with the diversity which makes it exciting.

Frenny cleverly explained the question which she often asked, and that is: what do we look out for when choosing Indian members? How many of you are familiar with Indian weddings – choosing a bride, daughter –in-law for your son is very much like choosing an Indian Member. First one must deal with the criticism. No two relatives will agree – one aunt will say she is too tall the other will say she is too short, too fat, too thin, overeducated. Other will say she has no qualification, she is too dark but no Indian will say she is too fair or too rich. What are they looking for? Not a PhD or a beautiful bombshell. They look for the compatibility and sensitivity to fit into their environment. In WIC we look for education, talent, commitment; for example, we have taken an Indian member who at her young age helps street children to learn dance and drama. One needs certain sensitivity, a requirement of spirit to be able to do so. Also we look for a spirit of friendship, one full of joy and fun. Remember if you don't use it you lose it. If we don't express our joy we soon cease to feel it and end up with psychological and physical ailments.

Frenny thanked the spirited and hard working Executive Committee, responsible and responsive for not interfering in our work. She said the world is full of willing people, some willing to work and others willing to let them. She believes the best way to succeed in life is to act on the advice you give others. But with all the intellect and talent remember what the Sage said - "Great is the power of the mind, but only love can make us kind. Otherwise the greatness of man is very small".

Frenny concluded by saying she wished Alice Gough, a happy roller coaster ride. She told her to enjoy the journey and that she has great confidence that Alice will do justice to the membership portfolio.

- **Report of the President Ms. Smita Divan:**

Smita said her family calls her an adventurous person. She said she loves challenges, and when she took over the presidency she knew it would be a challenging year. It has been a year of highs and lows and it became a year to educate herself on human behavior.

The first person Smita thanked was Emma Horne for her contributions to the newsletter. She then thanked Miran as hospitality chairperson. Smita said with her zen attitude towards life and ever present smile it was appreciated. It was because of Miran that the club was able to have the first and last meeting at the Ashoka. She then thanked Janet for recording and delivering the minutes efficiently. As membership chairperson Frenny, is one of the stalwarts of WIC and the club is fortunate to have her. She and her committee brought forth 34 new members making it still more vibrant and vigorous. Smita said Vibhuti was a quick learner and willing to accept suggestions. She kept the reins tight on the money and would not part with the money unless bills were presented. This resulted in a generous balance that will be left for the next committee.

Smita said Seita found time for Sushil Kumar the printer in spite of her professional commitments. She saw to it that all the material was collated and that it reached Emma by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month and she was ready with the newsletters for the General Meetings.

Smita then thanked the circle leaders who gave varied programs along with our gracious hostesses who opened their homes and some more than once.

Smita said most of the meetings were well attended. For example, the General Meeting in March had 93 in attendance, which was the largest number for this year. Smita said what was worrisome was the non-attendees; those who signed up and did not show up. She asked to be more considerate to the circle leader and to the hostesses.

During the course of the year, the club organized three special programs, as has been done in the past. Gurcharan Das spoke on the Gandhiji in the contemporary context, Sunita and her friends presented love poems with élan and the club celebrated women achievers; Dr. Romila Thapar and Aruna Roy, both international award winners. These were some memorable moments. To avoid using scarce venues they were held in Smita's home which she enjoyed hosting.

Smita said one area she felt a minor disappointment was the reluctance on the part of members to accept the Newsletter on e-mail. It would have been efficient and environmentally friendly.

Smita said she had two suggestions; first in order to keep continuity she feels it is important to have one of the executive members as an ex officio member on the incoming committee; at least for a couple of months. She said very often decisions taken by earlier committees get obliterated for want of information. Secondly, she said once the new slate is accepted by the members, it is very important for all of them to meet with the Nomination Committee. The new team should be informed about their duties and obligations, roles of each office bearer and the interpersonal relationships within the committee. It is vital for the smooth running of the committee.

In conclusion, Smita said she leaves the presidency with a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. Like Victor Hugo, 'Winter is on my head, but eternal spring is in my heart.' She said even at the age of 73 that old age is always fifteen years older than she is. Smita then welcomed the new committee.

#### **4. Presentation of Audited Accounts and Balance Sheet for Approval:**

The Audited Accounts were passed which was proposed by Mona Aggarwal and seconded by Ms. Shelia Thadani.

#### **5. Any Other Business:**

Ms. Darshan Inderjit enquired as to why there was an increase in the postage cost as compared to last year. The Committee said that for the last two years, stamps had not been put on the Reply Cards but as this year they had been provided, the cost naturally increased – Rs. 4/- per month X 150 members. Also, courier charges were substantial. Often, members forgot to pick up their newsletters or did not come to the General Meetings – their newsletters had to be sent by courier later. The inflation element also had to be taken into account.

Ms. Darshan Inderjit also asked as to why the Gala Night Expenses were more than the Receipts. The President said that Ms. Renu Mehra had also sent in a letter regarding the same. She said that the Club had subsidized the tickets in order to keep the price low. Also, the Committee had talked to the Auditors and had been advised not to leave behind a big balance as the Club does not file Income Tax Returns and could be questioned on the same. The President also mentioned that the Committee was leaving behind a healthy balance for the next Committee.

Ms. Renu Mehra mentioned that that were 47 guests at the Gala Night and that they had been charged only marginally more than the members. She felt that they should have been charged much more. Ms. Bindu Talwar also felt the same. Ms. Lakshmi Chandra (Second Vice-President) replied that, firstly, there was a restriction on the number of guests that a member could bring. Secondly, she said, the guests were either close relatives or very good friends. Also, a number of guests were foreigners who had been invited as they could be future members. Lakshmi said that the Committee had earlier thought of pricing the tickets at Rs.1500/- for members and Rs.1800/- for non-members but decided against it as they knew that no one would attend. Ms. Zakia Zaheer said that the tickets had been priced quite low this year and that more WIC members should have attended. The President mentioned that each and every member had been called up and invited for the Gala Night and that no ticket had been sold to non-members till the 1<sup>st</sup>. Of course, she was very positive about the suggestions and requested the President-Elect, Ms. Vaneeta Podewils, to keep an open mind towards them. Ms. Prama Bhandari said

that the Gala Night had been excellent – the tickets were very reasonable and what we got for the price was superb. Ms. Emma Horne also said that the Gala Night had been very good. She said that the Committee knew their finances and has left behind a healthy balance, not a deficit – we should trust them as we have chosen them.

Ms. Renu Mehra said that even if we have enough money in the kitty, we should not spend it on a single evening where all the members are not present. The money, she felt, could be spent on getting better venues for the General Meetings. The Treasurer said that we have to keep inflation in mind as well. Ms. Nina Dey Gupta mentioned that the money could be utilized in, taking all the members on a picnic. A special evening for the members and their spouses could also be organized by the Club.

Ms. Renu Mehra further mentioned that the Club had spent about a lakh of rupees extra on the Gala Night and that the Committee should have taken the sanction of the General Membership for this. She felt that this issue needed to be discussed and a figure arrived at beyond which sanction of the General Body would need to be taken. The President felt that this was not fair as you have to trust your Committee. She said that Rs.75,000/- is anyway kept aside for the Gala Night and only about Rs.35,000/- was spent extra in order to keep the ticket prices low. Lakshmi added that she had saved on the costs that were allowed for the General Meetings and the same funds had been diverted towards the Gala. Ms. Renu Mehra also brought up the point of the last newsletter which was in color, thereby adding to the cost. Ms. Seita Vaidialingam said that she had already explained the same in her report, namely that, as new Directories had not been printed this year due to their having been printed late last year, the Committee had a surplus budget for stationery. Also, it was a nice memento as it was the last newsletter.

Ms. Renu Mehra also brought up the point about sponsorship of the Gala Night. The President replied that this point had been negated about 10 years ago when a Special Committee consisting of Ms. Naina Goradia, Ms. Bapsi Nariman, Ms. Gita Kapurthala, Frenny Billimoria etc. had discussed the same. It had been felt that sponsorship can be misused. Ms. Naina Goradia said that perhaps we could do some re-thinking on the matter.

Ms. Niru Kapur brought up the point about the outstanding amount from the Park Hotel as shown in the accounts. The Treasurer explained that this was an adjustment that has been carried forward from the year 2006-07. There had been a mistake in the calculation that year. In order to wipe out the Park Hotel as a sundry debtor, she suggested that the New Committee ask the Hotel to refund the same in cash or kind.

Ms. Sunaina Aggarwal asked that as the Fixed Deposits were maturing in a few days, what was the need to put the funds in FD's again. The President explained that this was a form of security for the future just in case a number of members leave suddenly at the same time. Ms. Mona Aggarwal said that the Club should use the money in the FD's for venues for the AGM, General Meetings, Diwali and Christmas Programs. Smita said that this point could be considered by the New Committee.

Ms. Naina Goradia congratulated the Committee for balancing the budget and for giving us a wonderful Gala Night. Ms. Gita Kapurthala also congratulated the Committee and thanked them for their very interesting Circle Programs. Ms. Kavita Ratra also congratulated the Committee on a wonderful job. Ms. Bindu Talwar said that the subscription amounts should be taken at the AGM itself so that the Club gets the interest for four months. The President agreed with the same.

## **6. Presentation of the 2009-2010 WIC Executive Committee by the Nomination Committee**

The President requested Ms. Prama Bhandari to present the New Committee. The new slate was proposed by Ms. Kamla Sondhi and seconded by Ms. Darshan Inderjit after which the New Committee took over.

President: Vanetta Podewils

First Vice President: Zakia Zarir  
Second vice President: Sudhershana Singh  
Secretary: Shree Devi Singh  
Treasurer: Sunandini Kapur  
Membership: Alice Gough  
Hospitality: Tatiana Rabin  
Newsletter Editor: Anushree Mahajan

### **7. Incoming President's Speech of Acceptance**

The President, Ms. Vaneeta Podewils, thanked the Nominating Committee for placing their trust in the New Committee. She said that they would like to continue with the good work done by the last Committee and would need the support of the Club. She requested the members to sign up for the trip to Turkey if they were interested.

The First Vice-President, Ms. Zakia Zaheer, said that the last Committee had set a high standard and that they hoped they would be able to live up to it.

### **8. Resolution transferring the Bank Signatory Authority**

It was requested for the members to pass the resolution for transfer of the signatory authority from the past President Smita Divan and past Treasurer Vibhuti Sharma to the new President Vaneeta Podewils and the new Treasurer Sunandini Kapur. This was proposed by Kavita Ratra and seconded by Bubbles Suneja.

### **9. At Home**

The meeting concluded with the members departed the meeting for refreshments and tea.

  
Smita Divan  
President

  
Janet Kowall  
Secretary