



Sissel H. Michelsen

IIWCC 2021/2022

Dear Chair Cinzia and organising Committee.

Dear Madame President Ebe

Dear Friends,

Good afternoon – I would rather have been with you in beautiful Italy than sitting here in my son's old room, but covid restrictions in my hospital for my appointment next week, stopped my good intentions - very grateful for this Zoom possibility! Thank you for letting me attend!

I was originally asked to make a report, but making a report after two months' work, would be to give away information about the cases we so far have worked on – which would be unethical. Some of my work will surely shine through as this little speech will be my personal response to this and other meetings.

It is funny and sometimes rewarding the way one by accident finds a new niche also in IW. When I was DNR/Council Chairman in Norway, we were supposed to be in Denmark for the Nordic IW cooperation. Luckily for us, Denmark had been invited to Rostock, Germany, for *Bridging the Baltic* meeting the same weekend in September 2008, and we were invited, too. You really have to stretch your knowledge of geography to find where and if Norway borders the Baltic Sea at all, but historically with both the Vikings and the Hanseatic League trade, our City of Bergen being a Hanseatic member as well as it has given name to the first IW club in Europe outside Britain, NR Birgith and I felt more than welcome. There we met up with German, Swedish, Danish and Finnish IW friends, among them Hannele and Riitva-Liisa from Finland. At this successful social meeting and the Nordic part of it more down to business, we were told about the European Meetings, held twice. Then came the convention in Kota Kinabalu. Too many proposals were lost! Before I knew it, I ended up in Tampere, Finland in 2009 where I was asked by Hannele to chair the meeting and she should do the Minutes. She had joined our Norwegian party on our extended trip to Malaysia and we both knew we could work together. There I met up with Catherine for the second time and Luisa and Gabi for the first of those being present at this meeting.

Being a NR, or Council Chairman, or both, I'm sure that you may have experienced it to be a lonely profession. On your way up the IW hierarchy you've had colleagues to discuss and work with, and suddenly you are standing there alone on top of your national IW mountain trying to stand firm in the sometimes stormy weather. Whether

you like it or not, we may call this meeting our international trade union gathering! What can we do for our clubs, our districts, our country, our own Europe? We have newer member countries in Europe, but we also have those that were the pioneers – on the British Isles first, then to Norway, further out to the Continent, the rest of the Nordic countries. Inner Wheel was mushrooming, perhaps the first members liked to be those picked out and chosen because of their husbands and later also because of other family relations. I can only speak for myself here. I was asked several times to join from 1986. Why on earth should I join something because I was married to my husband? It was in fact below my dignity as a modern, well-educated woman earning my own wages, raising my children, cleaning my house, cooking and gardening – the chores were endless, as you know. But in the end I had to be polite and say, yes, I'll come with you to a meeting in the local IW club – in 1987. Our third objective won – to foster international understanding. I didn't join because of an inherent wish to work with Inner Wheel's constitution, but the way the club members welcomed me – and the work they were doing for a leper hospital and its patients in Madagascar. True international understanding and action! And I haven't looked back!

But I have asked myself the question, -Why do we get so many able women to join an Inner Wheel club – truly not to work with Inner Wheel constitution, but to enjoy friendship, to do something positive together. And this is where we can and have to start. Find out where the special interests lie with new members, and I'm sure, I don't even think that new members know we have a constitution – and if we start bombarding them with rules, especially what we can't do, I don't think they will stay on for long! In my own experience this growing interest goes through a change and becomes a need as members are climbing to the top – and of course some of us as senior members may destroy this growing interest by showing off our knowledge and hit them hard with our small, blue book. In the last Zoom meeting we were talking about a constitution council/committee internationally, but all countries need at least a constitution chairman where more national questions can be solved as she is culturally closer to the problems that may occur. As it may be today, we sometimes have to work with problems, sometimes acute in Clubs and districts as well as in their borderlines – cases that could with some effort have been solved nationally. And I have asked myself, do we really need bye-laws that in many cases mess up more than they solve?

At the Jaipur Convention we got rid of the canvassing paragraph. The question is, do we replace that one-liner with more than a page of what we can do or can't do in the heat of an election, or do we politely ask our members to act as decent, friendly women? In the Executive we have of course chosen the latter, which will be published with the list/lists of nominees. How do we as members react when we disagree on issues discussed? In this connection I remember with sadness the discussion of Proposal 17 in Istanbul 2012. I had spoken in favour of it, of course, whereas a senior Italian member opposed this proposal, and what did we hear – booing – from otherwise well-brought-up members. I was so shocked and at the same time so terribly afraid that she was going to have a heart attack. I was sitting next to her. We don't boo our friends. We are not members of a political party, but of an organisation not only emphasising friendship, but nourishing it as we are these days in Rimini! If we disagree, let's do it instyle.

This is also pointing at our work in the IIW Executive. A lot of different problems are put on our table and if we come up with a solution that doesn't fit with your or the sender's wishes, are we then biased, are we partial? The ideal thing is to seek information from both sides or all sides for that matter, before we can come up with a piece of advice or a solution. If we are in need of time and we don't have it, good intentions may be lost, unfortunately. We must be trustworthy and say why we ended up with what we eventually did.

At grand meetings all around our Inner Wheel world we speak of friendship, and what a fantastic organisation we belong to, but do we all experience true friendship? For many of our members this is really the case, but for some, it is the opposite. I personally have become hesitant using adjectives that are too flowery, because they can hurt more than they encourage. Those of you who know me also know that I like to speak my mind – as I am doing right now. It is definitely not always popular, but hiding things, sweeping bad things under the carpet and then highlight all the dust and dirt in one go, is devastating to Inner Wheel life on all levels. Let's have open discussions and dialogues. Let's live our objectives! The organising committee has made a good start here, promising for the real meeting starting just now!

An Inner Wheel Convention is the only meeting supported by IIW. That is also one of the reasons why I can't give a report as I'm only reporting to IIW. However, the European Meeting has its own standing, it's something we look forward to experiencing, to be a part of, to succeed. At one of the preliminary meetings on Zoom we talked about committees. On page 61 in C&H 2021 we can read about ad-hoc and other committees – but only at Club and District levels. Why not on international level? If we look at p. 28 CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION 5. a) which reads: "In case of urgency and provided that not less than 30 days' notice in writing has been given, this constitution may be changed at a meeting of the International Governing Body attended by a quorum of 75% of the members of the Governing Body by a resolution passed by a majority of 75% of those present. Such changes shall become immediate and temporarily effective for a period not exceeding 2 years, and shall be ratified or rejected by an International Convention, or failing this, shall lapse".

It doesn't say anything about whose ideas are to be handled, it doesn't emphasise the IGB.

I read this paragraph with an open mind and then from my point of view it should be open to inputs of practical solutions on blueprints for all member countries and possibly add to the list in HANDBOOK OF GENERAL INFORMATION p. 46 not only Disbandment of a Club but How to avoid disbandment of a Club. This is the sad case for clubs in many old IW countries in Europe as well as in Australia and New Zealand.

Who should send this to IIW – the Meeting itself or a chosen NR? One thing is certain, when Hannele and I had finished our report from the Tampere Meeting in 2008, we were terribly blue-eyed. We sent it to HQ and expected both admiration and gratitude. Nothing of the sort came our way – not one word – perhaps it wasn't received? Or those in office didn't know how to react as they were mostly used to give not to receive advice.

We may be impulsive in Inner Wheel – but we have to think about it first!

Let's be even more impulsive - think quick - work hard - enjoy friendship!
Thank you for listening!