



International Sub-Committee

Report on ACWW's 30th Triennial World Conference 2023



Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) held their 30th Triennial World Conference on 17th-25th May 2023 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The hostess society was Women's Institute of Pahang, Malaysia. The Conference took place at the Putrajaya Marriott Hotel.

There were nine delegates attending from Northern Ireland, including five with their partners. Two of which were celebrating their 40th wedding anniversaries.

Following their travelling, all delegates had to register for the Conference. This was done in the hotel foyer and everyone, including partners, was treated to a beautiful bag with their names on the front and very generous contents. Everyone received an extremely warm welcome from both the hostess society and the hotel staff.

Thursday, 18th May was the start of the Conference. During the morning there was a welcome session, providing an introduction to the Conference. This was followed by lunch and then area meetings. Area President, Ms Afrodita Roman addressed the European delegates. She discussed the many challenges during the pandemic with members continuing to organise events as far as was practicable. Zoom meetings became the norm in many places and many societies found novel ways to keep in touch with their members.

She mentioned that there have been deep negative effects on women affected by domestic violence as being isolated during the pandemic worsened their vulnerability. Rural women have neglected themselves and their health as they concentrated on looking after their children and other family members.

Afrodita's address was followed by a delightful afternoon tea and then our first evening meal of the conference – a welcome international buffet dinner.

The Opening Ceremony was held on Friday, 19th May and was a very special event, especially as it was in the presence of HM The King and HM The Queen of Malaysia, and The Regent of Pahang and accompanied by ACWW World President Mrs Magdie de Kock. We all had to be seated well in advance of the Royals arrival. Following the National Anthem of Malaysia, the ACWW Song of Peace was sang and a special blessing was given. Students from Multimedia University carried the Parade of Flags of Nations of ACWW members – there were 84 in total.

A welcome address was given by Her Majesty the Queen, Chairperson of the Hostess Society. This was followed by an opening address by ACWW World President, Magdie. Then, the Ceremonial Opening of the 30th Triennial World Conference was conducted by His Majesty the King, culminating in the banging of a large gong! After that, we were treated to opening dances, followed by the royal keynote address delivered by His Royal Highness, The Regent of Pahang speaking on Climate Change. To finish the ceremony, the national anthem of Malaysia was sang again and Their Majesties departed.

In the afternoon, there were sessions covering topics critical to ACWW's work and activities:

- **ACWW Revitalised** – World President Magdie de Kock, Area Presidents Afrodita Roman and Bonnie Teeples, and Executive Director Tish Collins gave an overview of changes made during the last Triennium.

ACWW operates in accordance with a strategic plan. In February 2022, the Board adopted a new strategy for 2022-2026, titled 'Rural Women in Action'. The key elements of ACWW remain unchanged. For instance, objectives remain the same – the relief of poverty, the relief of sickness, the protection and preservation of health, and the advancement of education for women in both rural and non-rural areas worldwide, to empower women and improve the quality of life.

One of the new measures introduced was the Coordinator's scheme. Its aim is to increase the depth and diversity of engagement with members worldwide.

At the end of 2022, the Association was down to 318 member societies in comparison to 440 member societies in 2019. The impact of Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis on rural organisations has been part of the reason. Others felt that they couldn't support the new Strategic Plan and logo. However, 24 new member societies have been welcomed in the Triennium, and 134 new individual members.

The new theme for 2023-2026 is Sustainable Growth for the Future.

- **Projects for the Future** – Looking at the link between ACWW's Projects and Advocacy work. Projects Committee Chairman Edwina Marr and UN Committee Chairman Marie Kenny were joined by ACWW Projects Participants.

ACWW projects primarily benefit rural women and children. Many of these women are strong activists in their own communities but don't usually have access to external funds. Grassroots organisations tend to have expert knowledge of their own communities. ACWW recognises its project partners as experts and teachers, rather than beneficiaries. ACWW does not implement the projects but rather funds them and works in partnership with these grassroots organisations.

New pilot projects for the Rural Women in Action programme were selected in 2022, with initial scoping visits conducted in Western Highland, Papua New Guinea and Rundu, Namibia. These visits help protect potential investment, assess suitability for project implementation, community safeguarding and partner reporting and identify challenges that the potential projects may face. Pilot projects will enter their next phase and be reported in the forthcoming annual report.

- **Human Rights, Intergenerational Cooperation & the Voice of Rural Women** – Area Presidents Marina Muller and Irene Chinje were joined by human rights lawyer Claire Mahon and youth advocate Tharinda Arumapperuma to discuss ensuring rural women are being heard locally, nationally and internationally.

Basic human rights are still unavailable to many in our world. For example, rural women make up over 25% of the world's population but continue to encounter barriers to quality, affordable, and accessible health care. In the past Triennium, ACWW has funded 14 projects relating to nutrition education for rural women, assistance to grow and maintain kitchen gardens to support family nutrition, training and development for healthcare workers and mental health education for students.

'Intergenerational' describes the impact of the interaction between different generations. Intergenerational collaboration has intrinsic and extrinsic value. It is conducive to forging important human connections that promote physical and emotional well-being. This is especially important in remote geographical areas. Friday ended with a beautiful Malay Set Dinner and entertainment.

Saturday, 20th May began with Conference Sessions for voting for the various resolutions. Five delegates from Northern Ireland took part in the voting process.

Conference Session 1 provided information on voting procedures along with adoption of the standing orders. Mrs Magdie de Kock, read her Presidential Address and Report. Then, Mrs Alison Burnet, Acting Treasurer, presented the Treasurer's Report, and Report of the Finance and Membership Committee. This was followed by an introduction of nominees for election to the Board of Trustees 2023-2026.

Conference Session 2 included the Report of the Projects Committee by Mrs Edwina Marr, Projects Committee Chairman. In addition, the report of the United Nations Committee was read out by Mrs Marie Kenny, UN Committee Chairman.

Resolutions were:

- Establishment of Rural Women's Employment Action Plans
- Addressing Food Waste
- Rural Gender Impact Analysis
- Correcting typographical errors
- 11.1.1 Special World Conference.

All of these resolutions obtained the required quota of votes to pass.

Conference Session 3 was held on Friday afternoon. Mrs Sheila Needham, C&M Committee Chairman read out the report of the Communications and Marketing Committee.

Resolutions were:

- 30. Bye-Laws & Rules
- Terminology – 2017 Constitution
- Terminology – Change of Title
- Bye-Law 4 The Countrywoman
- Bye-Law 11.5 (Withdrawn)

These resolutions also passed the voting process.

From 6-8pm voting for the Board of Trustees 2023-2026 took place in the Garden Room. The evening ended with an Indian Set Dinner and entertainment.

Sunday, 21st May was devoted to Conference Day Trips which were booked prior to the event. A number of the NI delegates had chosen to go on the trip to a Malaysian tropical rain forest. Unfortunately, there had been heavy rain overnight and it meant that we weren't allowed to walk into the forest. However, we were taken around in motorised buggies and it was a very enjoyable morning.

On our return, it was time to get titivated for our night at the palace! Every delegate had been invited to a grand Royal Gala Dinner at the National Palace. We were taken in coaches in a cavalcade headed by outback riders, stopping traffic at various junctions and lights, to allow us to pass, and when we arrived at the palace, it was simply breath taking. It was so, so beautiful and the evening was the highlight of the Conference.

The palace was extraordinary, each room more opulent than the last. Her Majesty greeted her guests and sat at the top table with other members of her family. We were treated to a truly delicious meal and this was followed by a fantastic display of Malaysian dancing by several young people. Each one seemed to be really enjoying themselves. It was a magical evening.

Monday, 22 May began with a lovely thanksgiving ceremony. The ceremony included The Song of Peace, Candle Lighting for those who had passed away, and Essentials of Life – Land, Crops, Clean Air, Clean Water and Education were represented.

Conference Session 4 followed our morning tea. Mrs Alison Burnett, Food and Agriculture Committee Chairman presented her report of the Food and Agriculture Committee.

Resolutions:

- Titles of Officers
- 3. Objects
- 10.2 Categories of Membership – Pennies for Friendship

Each of these resolutions met the necessary quota to pass.

The afternoon session was **Conference Session 5**. The Area Report was presented by Mrs Linda Hoy, Area President for Canada. Mrs Magdie de Kock, Acting Area President for Central and South Asia presented the Area Report for Central and South Asia.

Resolutions:

- 10.7 Termination of Membership
- 18.1.6 Removal of Trustees
- Membership Rates

The resolution '10.7 Termination of Membership' evoked much discussion, as it was allowing the World President and Executive Director to be solely involved in the termination process. It was suggested by some delegates that it could be improved by having at least one other ACWW board member involved. The vote was held and it failed to go through in its present form.

Removal of Trustees and increasing membership rates were both passed. An individual membership will now be £30.

There was a delicious Malaysian Street Food Showcase for our evening meal. This was followed by an ACWW Coordinators Reception with the World President for those that are currently Coordinators and those that were considering joining.

Tuesday, 23 May began with **Conference Session 6**. Mrs Irene Hinds, Area President for Caribbean, Central & South America read her report.

The Area Report for East, West, and Central Africa was delivered by Ms Irene Chinje, Area President for East, West, and Central Africa.

Resolutions:

- 26. Use of Electronic Communications (Withdrawn)
- 26.3.1 Use of Electronic Communications by ACWW (Withdrawn)
- 21.3 Procedure at meetings

The final resolution listed was passed.

After morning tea, the Conference Sessions resumed with **Session 7**. Ms Afrodita Roman, Area President for Europe delivered the Area Report. Also, Mrs Gail Commens, Area President for the South Pacific, delivered her Area Report.

Resolutions:

- 13.8 Proxy Voting
- 15.4.2 Trustee Positions

These resolutions were both passed.

Conference Session 8 took place in the afternoon. Area Reports were presented by Mrs Norjanah Razali, Area President for South East Asia and the Far East and Dr Marina Muller, Area President for Southern Africa.

Then, Mr Nick Newland, Advocacy Director spoke about ACWW's Work with Intergovernmental Organisations. Nick was elected as President of the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee in December 2022. Since then he has strengthened partnership with the National Commissions for UNESCO, building on existing relationships, and just this month, Nick has chaired the Liaison Committee's first Forum of the mandate, with a working title of 'Changing Mentalities for Gender Equality'. This position places ACWW at the decision-making table within UNESCO. Annually, the United Nations convenes the Commission on the Status of Women at its Headquarters in New York. This is a two-week gathering of governments, UN bodies, and civil society organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations like ACWW to discuss women's rights and agree new standards for action.

Following on, the location of the 31st Triennial World Conference 2026 was announced – **Ottawa, Canada!**

A representative from The Canadian Tourist Board delivered a presentation on the various sights and places to visit there.

A buffet dinner was provided in the evening and ACWW World President, Mrs Magdie de Kock, presented awards for the shoe bag and tray cloth competitions. Thanks go to everyone that entered the competitions from our own Federation. I had brought 29 shoe bag entries from Northern Ireland and some tray cloths. A fantastic response and all beautifully made! Christine Rankin's shoe bag deserves special mention. She was awarded a consolation prize which consisted of a signed certificate from Her Majesty, Queen Azizah along with a beautiful plaque. Congratulations Christine!

Wednesday, 24th May had a shorter **Conference Session 9** at 11.30am. Mrs Bonnie Temples delivered the Area Report for United States of America. Mrs Christine Reaburn, TWCC Committee Chairman, read the Report of the Triennial World Conference Committee. Urgency Resolution – Unique Lead Delegates (Submitted March 2023) was passed.

The new Board of Trustees 2023-2026 was announced. Mrs Magdie de Kock remains as World President; Ms Afrodita Roman continues as European President and Northern Ireland's Mrs Edwina Marr is a Board member. Congratulations to them all.

At 2.30pm, a closing ceremony took place and ended with all the Flags of Nations of ACWW members being taken out of the ballroom.

The final evening was very quiet as a number of delegates had tested positive for Covid.

As you can see, there was quite a packed schedule for the delegates. However, their partners were not forgotten about. They had the opportunity to go on daily outings such as a boat trip and playing golf.

Our hostess society couldn't have made us feel any more welcome. We were totally spoilt and everything was just amazing.

Thanks to the Women's Institute of Pahang, Malaysia including their President, Her Majesty Queen Azizah.

Federation Chairman, Margaret and I were travelling home together. Our flight wasn't until the early hours of Friday morning so after breakfast on Thursday, we went along with the other NI delegates on a trip to visit the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur. It was a lovely ending to a wonderful trip.

Rhoda Farrelly
FWINI International Sub-Committee Chairman

*Please note that the full reports cited within this International report are available at:
www.acww.org.uk