

## ***President in ICSW***

### ***Solveig Askjem 2003 -2008***

Quazi Faruque Ahmed from Bangladesh was the acting president of International Council of Social Welfare in 2003. He became unable to serve as president because of political control of him in his home country and he had to resign 2. September that year.

The story is: He was a clever lawyer and brought a lot of women's cases to court in order to support women's rights. This was not accepted by the men in political power in Dhaka and they threatened him in different ways. The start was to cut his international contact lines such as email, his telephone line was cut off and at last, he ended up in prison for a while.

I was elected by the Executive Committee to take over as president of ICSW in September 2003. At that time I was the vice president of ICSW Global and European president of ICSW. I became elected global president by the GA in 2004.

### ***Internal business – lack of funding - cut of costs***

The first part of my presidency was mainly characterized by internal business tasks. In 2003 we had our main office in London and three other offices, in Ottawa, Canada, in Bangkok, Thailand and in Kampala in Africa. After years of solid funding from UN after the Social Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen 1995, to follow up the 10 Commitments for action, we were running out of money. We had to cut staff and offices. We decided to close the Ottawa and Bangkok offices and moved the London office to Utrecht in The Netherlands. Here the organisation Institute for Care and Welfare, Utrecht, offered us free office. We decided to keep our office in Africa, in Kampala, Uganda.

With reduced staff we had to make priorities. We were able to keep our very competent executive director Denys Correll at the Utrecht office and the efficient program manager Roselyn Nakiryia in Entebbe, Kampala. We are happy to still have her in the Kampala office today in 2020.

### ***From support of operations to project financing***

It proved difficult to acquire economic support to operate our international social political organisation, and we had to revert to financing current projects.

Norway supported a number of seminars by OSCE «Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe» or Civil Society Forums with themes such as democratic development, conflict handling etc. We arranged seminars and forums in for instance in South-Africa, in Ghana, on Mauritius and in Jerevan, Armenia.

A successful training of executive directors of NGOs in Eastern- and South Africa was hosted of our member organisation placed in Mauritius in 2007.

We were also lucky to have project-support both from The Swedish and the Finnish Ministry of foreign affairs.

### ***World conferences***

As an information sharing organisation our world conferences are very important to ICSW. We decided to follow up the good tradition and together with a strong and competent local committee we planned ICSW 31st international conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2004. The theme was: «Social progress and social justice». The conference was a success and had app. 1100 participants, lots of them from the local regions. In 2006 the Brazilian Committee arranged the World conference in the Brasilia with the title: Social Welfare, Social Inclusion: Facing Poverty and Social Inequality.” The Brazilian conference was interesting, with more than 1000 participants from 44 countries. In 2008 the France committee arranged a world conference in Tours. The coming president Christian Rollet was the organiser, and 65 countries were represented. The title: “The Dynamics of Social welfare in Globalisation, Lessons from the past, Challenges for Today and Tomorrow” was a great platform with many good speakers. The French committee made an interesting written report from the conference in both French and English.

### ***The Black Sea NGO Network***

As president of ICSW in Europe I got in contact with an NGO in Armenia. I worked in Erevan for the Norwegian Refugee Council in 2000. Hripsime Karykosian was the president of Mission Armenia at that time and became one of our supporters. She ran the largest NGO in Armenia “Mission Armenia” and wanted to be member of a relevant international organisation. She knew a lot of NGO persons in the Black Sea countries and with money from Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Norway we arranged Civil Society Forums. We were happy to have support for 4 yearly meetings

in the region. In the first Forum in Erevan from 14.to 17.01.2004 we had participants from Romania, Bulgaria, Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova .The main topic was *“The role of Civil Society Organizations in the Development and Realization of Policies on Social Issues in the Region.”* Many of the participating countries became ICSW members. The breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991/92 led to large upheavals in these countries, and there was a need to reorganise both welfare systems and NGOs.

During 2008 the Black Sea NGO Network was legally registered in Armenia under the name: «The International Union of Black Sea NGOs» (IUBSNGO).This registration opened the way for formal recognition by the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. IUBSNGo participated also in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC).

### ***Networking***

ICSW has a sustainable global network of members, both individuals and organisations and they are a powerful force for change. As Global president, I had the pleasure to get funding for my traveling by The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Norway, which gave me the possibility to visit a lot of our member organisations. I took part in seminars, meetings and conferences in many countries. I visited 49 countries, some as far away from Norway as Australia, Brazil, Argentine, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Zambia, South Afrika, USA, Mauritius, Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Malaysia, Armenia and Georgia and may countries in Europe. All together I travelled for 390 days to foreign countries in my time as president. I learned much about the differences of social problems: For example, in Bangladesh they had flooding as a big problem; people lost their houses and good land for growing vegetables and they wanted better flood warnings. In other areas absence of rain was the big problem, causing hunger. I became extremely impressed by the good work our member organisations did for vulnerable people all over the world. I saw with my own eyes that ICSW was making a difference for people in need. I took part in many local and regional conferences and had the opportunity to meet ICSW people from many different organisations.

ICSW took part in the” Commission of Social Development” in UN in New York every year from 2003 to 2008 and we were also regularly active

participants in the NGOs meetings there. We brought several written statements for hand out and our GS was present it in the meetings.

To be in New York and to meet several NGO members from all over the world made ICSW visible and we acquired many important contacts for further cooperation.

### ***Information***

Information sharing is important for a worldwide organisation.

“Global Cooperation newsletter” was monthly circulated in French, Spanish and English to stakeholders in social welfare and social development. We published “Global Social Policy Digest” in the journal “Global Social Policy”, and cooperated with IFSW about “International Social Work”. The information sharing was particularly important to our members

The Regional Newsletters and sharing of minutes from meetings were also very much needed.

We cooperated with Sage Publication for many years to strengthen our information to our members.

### ***Conclusion:***

It was an honour to serve as president of ICSW and I learned much about international social work. An incredibly lot of people gave of their time and worked intensely to help in need of help. I witnessed how many cared about giving help, providing food and shelter for the hungry and homeless. Strengthening their local social politics was important to many of our member organisations, and some had active social political advisors

ICSW is a world organisation promoting Social Development. It is my hope that ICSW also in the future will be able to promote a better life for vulnerable people.