

## **Address to Aotearoa/New Zealand Annual General Meeting**

### ***Acknowledge traditional owners and greetings***

Tena koutou katoa  
Hello everyone

Nga mihi mahana ki a koutou  
Warm greetings to you all

Kia ora ki Ngati Whatua mo te mihi  
Thank you for the welcome Ngati Whatua

Thank you for the invitation, the welcome and the hospitality. Thank you to Di and her board, to Tonelle for organising the logistics of my visit (little did I know she's been in the job less than a month!) and to all of you for coming, especially for bringing your baby (since I had to leave my little one at home).

I bring you greetings from the World YWCA, from our General Secretary Nyaradzai and our Regional Director for Asia Pacific Juli Dugdale. They are sorry not to be with you here today as planned, but they have promised to be in the Pacific in November, so I hope you will have the pleasure of their company then.

### ***Introduction***

Think for a moment about how you came to join the Y – the job was too good an opportunity to miss; a friend twisted your arm; you were curious about a colleague's involvement in this organization; your mother or sister or aunty signed you up; it just somehow happened to be the right thing at the right time. One of the Y's strengths is the way it brings together women from so many walks of life for so many different reasons: we join as program participants, staff members, volunteers, board members.

I remember when I joined the board of the Melbourne YWCA – a product of the 25% rule. I was a disheartened 23 year old articled clerk in a law firm – the Y's rich history, its active programmes in the community, the impressive women it counted amongst its members and supporters all intrigued and inspired me, but it was the Y's global connections which really captured my imagination. After all, like most young law graduates, I was a frustrated international human rights lawyer trapped in a corporate law firm and the YWCA was my outlet to the world.

My respect and admiration for the movement was only reinforced when I attended the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing as a YWCA delegate and found myself in a succession of workshops, seminars and other sessions where as women introduced themselves, the YWCA repeatedly featured – women from all round the world said "Hi, I'm Mwajuma from the YWCA of Kenya, I'm Sylvia from the YWCA of the USA, Rashini from Malaysia, Amelia from Fiji ... Japan, ... Mexico".

As I became more involved in the YWCA, I learned about the affiliation of the black South African YWCA during apartheid; the pro choice YWCAs of Latin America; the former World President Dame Nita Barrow who became Governor General of Barbados; the emergent YWCA movement in eastern Europe after the fall of communism, rejuvenated by young women and their grandmothers who had been members before the revolution; the YWCA in

mainland China which chooses not to affiliate with the world movement so it can continue its work with women in need; the YWCAs borne in the aftermath of conflict in Albania, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo; the one imperative of the YWCA in the USA to eliminate racism by all means necessary; the kindergartens in the refugee camps in the West Bank of Palestine. Everywhere – growing leaders, meeting community needs, responding to crisis, building friendships across conflict, standing up for women’s rights. When I think about the disconnect and tension and disagreement we sometimes experience within our own national movements, I imagine what it would have been like to have been the women of the YWCAs of Germany and Japan attending their first World Council after the Second World War.

Now, in a globalised world where connections are easier but identity is more fragile, where religion is represented as a basis for division and conflict rather than for understanding and justice, where the impact on women of global phenomena like HIV, climate change, armed conflict and the global economic environment are all pressing, gendered and almost overwhelming in their magnitude and seriousness, the World YWCA is vital to contributing to international debate, shaping international opinion and action, supporting local responses and bringing about social change.

I hope that gives you a taste of why I joined the YWCA. But if you’d told that 23 year old woman that 15 years later she would serve in the leadership of this global women’s movement, I don’t know if she’d have taken you very seriously.

### ***Introduction to World YWCA***

What I hope to share with you over the next hour is a brief sense of who the World YWCA is in the world, a glimpse of what we hope to achieve over the next quadrennium and how you as members of the YWCA movement worldwide are key resources in that work.

### ***Identity***

The YWCA is a movement of 25 million women and girls in 125 countries, affirming the human rights of all women and girls, advancing the Millennium Development Goals, at the forefront of raising the status of women for over a century by advocating for peace, justice, human rights and care for the environment.

Around the world, YWCAs are working on everything from violence against women, economic empowerment, education and literacy, sexual and reproductive health, women’s political participation, climate change.

Let me give you a snap shot. YWCAs provide:

- Shelters for girls fleeing female circumcision in Kenya;
- Work with refugee women and their families in Belgium;
- Peace activism in Japan;
- Computer training classes for young HIV positive women in Peru;
- Support for women re-integrating with their villages after being sex slaves or child soldiers during the civil war in Sierra Leone;
- Vocational training for women in prison in Samoa;
- A youth club for sex workers aged 15-25, mostly mothers, run by an HIV positive young woman in Uganda;
- A resource and support centre for survivors of domestic violence in Lebanon;
- Award winning projects with Roma (or gypsy) communities in Albania;

If you are a young woman in the slums of Bangladesh, the YWCA will educate your daughter, provide your family with health care and nutrition, offer sex education and give you literacy training as well as income generating opportunities to help you support your family and keep your daughter in school. In Bangladesh, the adult literacy rate is 38% and nearly 30% of the population lives on less than one dollar a day.

If you are a fashion conscious early school leaver in Belize, you can go to Bella Expressions, one of the YWCA beauty salon and barbershops, where you can get vocational skills and find a safe and easy environment in which to talk about your boyfriend, sex and condoms. Belize has the highest prevalence of HIV in Central America.

If you are one of the many girl children who heads a household in Rwanda, you can join the YWCA's Giving Hope programme which helps orphans and vulnerable children to stay at school, develop income generating activities and promote health and hygiene. A third of the children supported by the YWCA of Rwanda are from child headed households.

If you are a young woman in Belarus considering the offer to relocate to Western Europe to work in a restaurant or as a nanny or as a housekeeper, you can call the La Strada telephone hotline for advice about migration issues and trafficking risks. Trafficking is one of the most urgent problems facing women in Belarus.

All our work is about responding to the needs and rights of women and their families in local communities; it is underpinned by a conviction about the value of women's leadership, especially young women's leadership and by a commitment to social change.

But depending where you are in the world, the YWCA is a feminist organisation, a development NGO, a Christian youth movement, a local women's support and fellowship group, a women's service delivery organisation or a combination of all of these.

Across this immense difference in our programmes and this huge variety in how we perceive ourselves or how we are perceived, how do we forge a sense of common purpose and unity?

How do we distinguish ourselves from the crowd?

How does the World YWCA differ from other global advocacy organisations like Human Rights Watch or the Red Cross or UNIFEM: we are a membership movement, not just made up of affiliated organisations, but built on individual women. This is a key to our legitimacy: our leaders are elected, we practice democracy. This is a critical part of growing women leaders. Just as in New Zealand and Australia, YWCAs in many developed countries are challenged by how to sustain and grow their membership in an era when people don't join organisations any more; they sign on line petitions, wear campaign T-shirts, make direct debit donations or go to charity rock concerts, but don't have a life long association with a church parish or golf club or Rotary. What people do have in my home town is a cradle to grave religious allegiance to their football teams; maybe all we need to do is sponsor a team in our national football league...

How do we differ from other membership organisations like Amnesty, other development NGOs like OXFAM, other ecumenical organisations like the World Council of Churches: we are led by women. Whether we describe ourselves as feminists or not (a dormant debate for some YWCAs in Australia), this commitment to women's leadership distinguishes us because it suggests we think there is something distinctive and valuable about how women lead and where women will lead us.

How do we differ from other women's organisations like the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom or the International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS or the Women Won't Wait anti-violence network: by contrast with organisations targeting a single goal, we are a multi-focus movement which takes up the causes and concerns of a diverse body of women through the lens of women's leadership.

All of the organisations I have mentioned are our partners, fellow campaigners and friends. How else are we different from most of them? At the World level, we do our work with a core budget of less than \$5million SF (who knows how many US dollars that is today) and a staff team of 22 women. We are a little fish with a big mouth and a growing appetite in a very big pond. Compare Amnesty with an international head quarters in the hundreds; the Red Cross with a budget which makes us the corner shop to their global supermarket chain; even the YMCA with five regional offices in addition to their Geneva HQ. There is of course a link here between being poor and being a women's organisation: the vast majority of women's organisations work with a budget of less than \$50,000, we are all chronically under-resourced in financial terms and in all our public advocacy, the World YWCA emphasises the importance of investing equitably in women's organisations and women's leadership. It's no coincidence that we use the expression "necessity is the mother of invention" because there is definitely a gender dimension in our resourcefulness, efficiency and effectiveness. So how do we flourish? Our strongest YWCA resource is you: our member associations, through your expertise, your partnerships and your individual members. You give us authority, credibility, relationships and knowledge. You are central to the longevity and success of the World YWCA as an enterprise.

### ***Inheritance***

So, what did our world leadership team inherit almost 2 years ago in Nairobi?

An extraordinary history of over 150 years of passionate service and leadership by and for women in local communities world wide, a presence at the UN from its earliest years, such a strong reputation in the women's movement that we chaired the first three of the four NGO forums associated with the four UN Conferences on Women in 1975, 1980 and 1985, and a key role in global achievements over the last century: peace movements, decolonisation, women's liberation, fair globalisation.

Our elected board is diverse and skilled and young; more than 50% of its members are under 30; we are a mining lawyer from DRC, students from Honduras, Scotland and American Samoa, a marketing director for a pharmaceutical company in the Philippines, community development workers from Peru, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Canada, Zimbabwe and the Netherlands, a UNICEF director from Jordan, a princess from Nigeria, bankers from the US and Canada, a director of the women's department in Belize, managers in local and national governments in Finland and Trinidad and Tobago, and a journalist from Palestine.

Our General Secretary is from Zimbabwe, a human rights lawyer with a history in UNIFEM, the UN agency for women, the youngest of 11 children from a rural village. She is a stunning advocate, a formidable fundraiser and under 40 at the time of her appointment, the youngest World General Secretary to have served within known memory.

We became custodians of a revised Constitution which entrenches young women's leadership, equalises member association representation, embeds regional representation

and expresses our core values and beliefs in new and inclusive language. Our world purpose is echoed in the preamble of the YWCA of Aotearoa/New Zealand:

To develop the leadership and collective power of women and girls around the world to achieve justice, peace, health, human dignity, freedom and a sustainable environment for all people.

We pledged to act collectively and individually to take leadership in the response to HIV and AIDs through a comprehensive ten point Call to Action developed by a team of HIV positive women and YWCA women.

We adopted strategic directions around leadership development and capacity building, advocacy and services, good governance and accountability.

We launched the first phase of the Power to Change Fund.

And we inherited the immense and inspiring potential of the YWCA.

### **Aspirations**

Let me share a few of our key ambitions for the next few years.

First, to build the advocacy profile of the World YWCA.

The distinctive quality of our advocacy is that it is founded in the experience of women in local communities, in villages, towns, cities around the world.

Over the last ten years, we have built a reputation as a leading women's organization in the response to HIV and this reputation is built on the work of YWCAs in 70 countries. It is also built on the early and equal partnership we forged with the International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS, a small but mighty organization which speaks with the voice of those most affected. It is also built on our fundamental commitment to human dignity and human rights. At the International AIDS Conference of some 25,000 people in Mexico last year, in a space where scientists, politicians, philanthropists and activists all jostle for position, we insisted on keeping women on the agenda. We called for all participants to invest in women and girls; ensure women's safety; and to eliminate stigma and discrimination. The World YWCA was an important contributor to the ecumenical gathering which preceded the main conference. We hosted a panel on the church's response to gender based violence in the context of HIV and an HIV positive woman from the YWCA spoke about the role of the church in supporting, welcoming and including women infected and affected by HIV. Later that day, in a very memorable and powerful moment of the conference, the President of the World Lutheran Federation in an act of public repentance for the failure of the church to people living with HIV washed the feet of two HIV positive women: a young Namibian woman whose story of sexual assault by a truck driver shocked and saddened everyone and our own Sophie Dilmitis, World YWCA HIV Coordinator. His humility and their acceptance of his gesture and their capacity to forgive were immensely moving.

Our responsibility is to keep the female face of HIV at the forefront of global responses, even as the pandemic changes and the challenges it presents shift across time and geography. One of the challenges for countries where the epidemic is concentrated in particular populations, for example amongst injecting drug users or men who have sex with

men, is to remember the links between violence, poverty, gender inequality, stigma and HIV, to promote the sexual and reproductive health rights of women generally and to understand how YWCA programmes which support healthy, ethical and respectful relationships, including sexual relationships, between young women and young men are instrumental in the fight against HIV.

In October last year, the World Board resolved to build on the strength of our advocacy on HIV and make stronger the links between this work and our extensive work throughout the movement on violence against women. Again, more than 2/3 of our member associations work on violence, whether providing shelter, violence prevention programmes, conflict resolution training or anti-violence advocacy campaigns. This work reflects that violence can happen in the home, in the workplace, in the street, during armed conflict and during peace time. It damages women and children physically, emotionally and psychologically. It costs communities a small fortune. It diminishes all of us. You have heard that this theme of Women Creating a Safe World is the chosen focus for World Council 2011 in Zurich. We are talking about how women are peace builders not just victims of armed conflict, how we are survivors not just sufferers, how we are all collectively responsible and accountable for tolerating violence, how violence is embedded in all our cultures in profound ways which we have a capacity and duty to rethink.

A second ambition: to be a global leader in young women's leadership. Not many organizations can boast the track record of the YWCA in practicing young women's leadership. When I joined the Y it was the only women's organization that didn't just talk about young women's participation but actively involved them: including young women in decision making, not just as tokens but as a critical mass in boards and committees; dedicating resources to young women; delivering programmes designed by young women; and trusting young women to identify their own priorities and develop their own solutions. But of course, today's young woman is tomorrow's older woman; or looked at another way, today's older woman is yesterday's young woman. My point is, this commitment and priority cannot be static. It requires constant energy and attention. I'm not convinced it ever becomes self-perpetuating. Part of our response is embedded in our Constitutional requirements which make young women's participation non-negotiable, part of it is delivered through our internships and training programmes dedicated for young women, part of it is ensuring that young women are leaders in our delegations within and beyond the YWCA. Recently at an International Colloquium on Women's Leadership on Peace, Security and Development co-hosted by the President of Liberia and the President of Finland, both women, the YWCA was invited to organize a young women's forum. Under political pressure, this became a youth forum for both young men and women, a very valuable but very different conversation than we had planned. What we were able to ensure was that when all the dignitaries and officials finished their speeches and addresses, a young woman from the Caribbean from the YWCA of Barbados rose on the red carpet and delivered a passionate, compelling account of young women's solutions to global problems.

I recently discovered in a YWCA Malaysia newsletter some tips on how to reach out to young women. It read,

- Ask a young woman what's important to her
- Recapture your sense of fun
- Be defenceless, not defensive

- Offer her a ride home
- Give her positive feedback
- Share power, share knowledge
- Be inclusive—diversify!
- Embrace change, embrace each other
- Be a positive role model

And at the bottom, source: YWCA of Aotearoa (New Zealand)

I think Aotearoa/New Zealand can rightly claim some expertise in advancing young women's leadership **and** modelling intergenerational leadership. You have brought impressive delegations to successive World Councils, you have worked hard to ensure young women are not just participants but true leaders. I wonder if ANZ and Australia could collaborate with our sister YWCAs in the Pacific to develop a regional application to the Power to Change Fund to host a young women's leadership gathering and programme.

And while I am at it, let me also acknowledge two other key contributions Aotearoa has made to our world movement: first, bringing the question of the credal base to a World Council, I learnt last night as long ago as 1987. I know it took much longer and took a much different course than was originally thought, but we reached a good place at the last World Council. I can't say "we got there in the end" because I think we must always regard the conversations about our values as a work in progress. Some of our values are abiding and lasting and are unlikely to change – one of those is our willingness to reflect creatively on who we are and what we stand for. This is a good thing.

Second, I want to acknowledge how Aotearoa/NZ has doggedly pursued the rights of indigenous women and insisted on their full participation and recognition within the World YWCA movement. You have educated women around the world who didn't know who indigenous women were, you cajoled, you pestered, you modelled and you have proven the success of true partnerships between indigenous and non-indigenous women. Thank you.

Let me return to the theme of leadership. We are constantly called to reflect on what leadership means, to think critically about what women's leadership means. Is it election to public office, appointment as a judge, a chair in a university, a CEO in a corporation, a bishop in a church – places with widespread influence? Isn't leadership also serving as a teacher, an engineer, a shop keeper, a farmer, a bureaucrat – and in those roles challenging stereotypes, insisting on equal treatment for oneself and others and making decisions ethically and fairly? Could leadership also be about equipping women with confidence to negotiate safer sex, leave a violence relationship, demand clean water for her village? In the YWCA, we understand leadership to be about critically engaging with one's space – whether it is the home, the village, the community or the world, seeing the scope for improvement and acting to bring about the change, with benefits extending beyond one's own immediate interests. We talk about enablers, those who with others, create change.

A third ambition is to maintain our support for our member associations. We are only as strong as the weakest and smallest amongst us. There are a multitude of different ways to organize ourselves as YWCAs, but we have set the minimum standards for participation in the world movement through our new conditions of affiliation. We know already that some member associations will struggle with these – particularly with the requirement for young women's leadership and with demonstrating substantial compliance with the Standards of

Good Management and Accountability. We also know that there are increasing examples of regional and bilateral ways of work going on in the movement; some of them successful, some of them delivering learnings, occasionally painful. All of our member associations can tell of struggling YWCAs, YWCAs in decline, YWCAs which exist in name only. Sometimes we can give peer support, sometimes we can partner, sometimes we can absorb. Sometimes we wait patiently for change to just “happen”. We don’t like to cut off and in my view, except in extreme circumstances, that’s a good instinct. But I don’t think we can afford to ignore.

The building blocks towards our common identity and towards our good health are these core elements:

- Our name. Yes, I do wish the Village People had sung about the “YWCA” all those years ago or at least that we were compensated with a \$1 every time we were called the YMCA. But we can never underestimate the power of our name. And for those of us who think the “Young Women’s Christian Association” is a bit of a mouthful, it’s interesting to think how quickly acronyms can become names – like Oxfam or KFC.
- Our brand (or values). I very deliberately don’t say logo. I know realize how recognizable the triangle and the circle and our letters are. But I am also realistic enough to know that policing compliance with a logo is not World YWCA core business. And ultimately, I think the power of the YWCA is in what we do and how we do it, not in the pictures on our letterhead.
- Our programmes. While the ability of YWCAs to respond to local needs will always be a hallmark of our movement, the benefits to our profile and our organizing of sharing programmes cannot be overlooked. Having a common programme on the elimination of violence, the prevention of HIV, the leadership of young women is an incredibly powerful expression of who we are and what we believe in. Finding those spaces of common ground and developing common programming has been essential in the World YWCA building our global identity.
- Our advocacy. Here too many YWCAs are taking a big step, from delivering excellent programmes and serving communities faithfully to articulating publicly the change that needs to happen.

Some of these are already embedded in our Constitutional requirements for affiliation. Some of them are easy to give lip service to and much harder to deliver. Some of them require trust and collaboration and willingness to try something new.

Fourth, and linked to all of the above goals, is an ambition about resources, both their accumulation and their distribution. As I suggested earlier, we share with many women’s organisations a shortage of resources to do the work we want to do.

I want to make an observation about this common need for more resources: the historic and persistent undervaluing of women’s work, women’s priorities and women’s development has engendered a talent in women’s organizations for incredible efficiency and effectiveness (as we say, we “get by on the smell of an oily rag”). This can sometimes translate into a mentality of “making do” or “thinking small”, a culture of resignation to an impoverished but virtuous state. More often, it manifests in tenacious hard work, an enterprising spirit and an infectious optimism, based on an unerring and lasting conviction that what we as women do matters. I say this in the acknowledgement of deeply entrenched social and economic attitudes and practices which place an inequitable burden of care on women, which reinforce poverty and which deny women access to basic

entitlements. One legacy of gender inequality is strong, self-reliant communities with informal networks of support, both emotional and material. One only has to visualize the way in which women prepare meals for a housebound friend to know what I mean. Another consequence of injustice is to fuel an energy and passion which complacency, comfort and institutionalized power often erodes.

We have a history in the YWCA movement of creative ways of financing our work: through early philanthropic relationships, through generous self-giving, through fledgling enterprises, through ethical investments, through income generation from hotels, through membership dues and programme fees.

But in the Power to Change Fund campaign, the World YWCA was looking for a new generation of funding, a lasting resource that would be available regardless of political climate, currency fluctuations, economic downturns or inconsistencies in annual support from donor or members: a resource that would take us beyond a “hand to mouth” existence into a future where we could resource the leadership development of women, especially young women, and girls with passion, vision and ambition, without the distraction of worrying how to pay the phone bill.

From the outset, the YWCA Power to Change Fund campaign was far more than a fundraising exercise. It gave us the opportunity to share our message and raise awareness about the YWCA; to build new links with donors, partners, friends and members; to develop new skills as we learnt updated techniques for communicating and fundraising; to persuade new investors to join the cause and witness the rewards. It reinvigorated our sense of purpose about the value of YWCA work, gave local YWCAs a greater sense of connection to their sister YWCAs and harnessed new energy for the whole YWCA movement.

Throughout the 8 year gestation, we fostered a principle of equal giving, or equal sacrifice, reflecting the reality that \$1US in Nepal is a lot harder to raise than \$1US in New Zealand. I emphasise two aspects of our idea of equal giving: first that everyone has something to give and the poorest YWCAs have an equal stake in the success of the organization and that the act of giving to your own organization is an act of confidence and self-belief. The act of giving is itself a manifestation of empowerment, of how women can use their economic power, however limited, to bring about social change. Second, that in making a larger financial contribution in dollar terms, wealthier associations were simply contributing according to their means.

In July 2007 we launched the Fund with \$10.5 million. The World Board has committed to continue to build the Fund and a strategy to that end is to be produced for our next Board meeting. The World Board has also adopted the policy to enable the first distributions from the Fund. Thus far, the Fund has supported a delegation of 30 YWCA women to the AIDS conference and a delegation of 10 YWCA women to the Liberia Colloquium on Women’s Leadership. We have called for applications from the movement. Joint applications from collaborating member associations which focus on women’s leadership are encouraged. For example, a Pacific young women’s leadership programme...

Lastly, I would share with this group an earnest hope that together we might build a stronger Pacific region. Call it parochialism, call it loyalty, I have witnessed too often in international settings how we are “remote”, when it is the rest of the world which is far away, not us! All of the most pressing global issues can find themselves manifest in our region:

climate change, poverty, peace and conflict, violence against women, HIV. Did I mention an application to the Power to Change Fund for a Pacific young women's leadership programme? The Australian National Board is meeting next week to talk about how we might better collaborate with PNG, Fiji, the Solomons and the Samoas and fledgling work in East Timor. What wisdom would you want me to share with them?

### **Conclusion**

Sometimes we use our history and our size to define us. We say we are one of the world's oldest and largest women's organizations. And we are rightly proud of our history of 150 years. It inspires and motivates us. But longevity can also be an impediment to innovation and evolution. We just assume we will be here in 150 years. For myself, I can't imagine that far hence (and who knows what state the planet will be in). So let's take a time frame we can more easily conceive. I want to think back 20 years ago to 1988: Madonna had only been around for 5 years, we had no internet (let alone Facebook, Bebo or Twitter), no globalisation, no HIV on the global public agenda, apartheid in South Africa, the Berlin Wall split East and West, and no hint of an African American in the White House (remember Ronald Reagan). So consider 20 years hence. Part of what this Board aims to do is lead the movement in imagining what the world will be like and what the YWCA in the world will be like. I hope that in the course of the regional meetings over 2009 we will turn our minds to that longer term future and ask how we might recognise the YWCA. I hope that it might still have some of the hallmarks of the vision for the World YWCA that I expressed in Nairobi in 2007:

A movement which grows young women into leaders; which speaks for women on the global stage with authority because we know women's lives in their local communities; which fosters the spiritual dimension of women's lives while realising their social, economic and cultural rights; it promotes accountability; it builds relationships between women of different ages, cultures, backgrounds and circumstances.

And that the work of member associations will continue to drive our success. So in the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, one of our champions of women's human rights who asked "where after all do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home. Unless rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the large world".

So, here in your small places close to home, I encourage you to grow the work of the YWCA, its impact and its reach, so that in all our encounters we touch women's lives in memorable and constructive and inspiring ways.

Song: Waka nini yana by Lou Bennett of the Yorta Yorta people

**2 May 2009**