

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AGM 2008**

### **LINDA CARR**

A few years ago I felt very honoured when asked to stand as a Vice-Chairman of AJWO but little did I know then how fast things would progress. Here I stand now giving my first Annual Report.

As you must all be aware, we live in a world where Information Technology is paramount. Communication is instant and almost everyone is connected via the worldwide web. And AJWO is no exception. With the hands on computer skills of a wonderful young man we now have a bright and modern website where we advertise ourselves, our events and our Affiliates. Do please log on and take a look at the website, and please do encourage others in your organisations to do likewise.

I vividly remember when I first began attending Council Meetings that the Chairman would come laden down with correspondence, brochures and all manner of information. How times have changed. Now very little comes via the post – instead each day I receive a deluge of emails on my computer.

One of the great pleasures of being Chairman of AJWO is the opportunity it affords to represent our organisation at various events and to meet with people from all different walks of life. On your behalf I have accepted a number of invitations and always use my best endeavours to bring our organisation to the notice of as many people as possible.

The first invitation I received on taking office was to the 2007 AGM of The League of Jewish Women. The League (or LJW as they prefer to be known) is a staunch supporter of AJWO and we are ever grateful to them for allowing us to use their address as a postbox and for their assistance in forwarding mail and taking phonecalls.

In December I was invited to a Chanukah reception given by the Foreign Secretary at his official residence in Carlton Terrace. Amongst the many distinguished guests was the new Israeli Ambassador, Ron Prosser. When I was introduced to David Miliband he was most impressed that, being chairman of an umbrella organisation, I might have a 'block vote'. I had to explain to him that that was not how AJWO worked!

Once again AJWO was invited to join in the opening ceremony of the Northwood Holocaust Memorial Day Event and on this occasion we were represented by Louise Freedman and Rita Adler. This ever successful event is a wonderful example of two synagogues, one Orthodox and one Liberal, working together for the greater good.

For a long time AJWO has been a Partner to the Women's National Commission and in February I attended a meeting at the House of Lords chaired by Baroness Joyce Gould. This was in preparation for the 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women which was due to take place in New York.

It was my pleasure to represent AJWO at the launch of Jewish Women's Week and at the Induction of Rabbi Jeremy Gordon at the New London Synagogue. On your behalf

I also attended the memorial service for Ruth Winston Fox who was a friend and colleague to many of our past and present members.

Rita Adler was our representative at the annual dinner of the Association of United Synagogue Women. She tells me that she had a most enjoyable evening whilst at the same time waving the flag for AJWO.

Many of us receive regular daily bulletins from BICOM (Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre) and in April I attended a day long Israel Advocacy Conference. There were a number of high profile speakers, including Lorna Fitzsimons, their Chief Executive, who is a most passionate advocate for Israel. We have certainly made a good choice in asking her to speak at our forthcoming Seminar.

During the year AJWO has been a loyal supporter of the Women's Interfaith Network which is chaired by Lady Gilda Levy and we have participated in many of their events. Helen Reisman attended a private viewing of the Sacred Books at the British Library and Valerie Bello took part in a Dialogue Seminar. Penny Conway and I attended a Leadership Training Day and we both also attended a conference for Jewish and Muslim women. In addition there were two most interesting tours - of the Regents Park Mosque and Westminster Cathedral. I always advertise these events to our Members of Council and I would highly recommend them to you. It is a wonderful way of meeting and communicating with women of many different faiths, and everyone comes together in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

I would now like to report on our affiliation to The National Council of Women. AJWO has a representative on most of its Policy Committees and at each of our Council Meetings we get in-depth reports which often result in some lively debate. Since taking the Chair I have attended all their Affiliate Meetings, each of which has addressed a topic of particular concern to women. I was also invited as a guest to an excellent Arts Committee Seminar which addressed the problem of funding for the Arts, and The Return of Looted Art. I would like to thank all our Policy Committee Representatives for their excellent reports, and a special thank you to June Cowan who always gives us a most interesting resumé of the proceedings at the NCW Annual Conference.

And finally, I somehow managed to round off my first year in the Chair in exactly the same way I started. Last Tuesday I attended the 2008 AGM of the League.

Louise Freedman, our most efficient Deputy at the Board, keeps us fully updated with its bulletins and reports. In January at a Plenary Session she put a question to the President on behalf of AJWO regarding the BBC's bias and lack of reporting on the relentless Kassam rocket attacks against Israel. We urged the Board to challenge the BBC in this respect.

Two of our affiliate organisations were able to respond favourably to a request from FZY (the Federation of Zionist Youth) for help in stocking their new library with books that would encourage their female members to take more active leadership roles. And isn't that in part what AJWO is all about.

We now get regular email bulletins and newsletters from the London Civic Forum and the Women's National Commission. These I regularly forward to you, plus many other communications which may be of interest.

Last year's Seminar 'Chicken Soup and Modern Medicine' was a great success and a complete sell-out. The three speakers, Vivienne Vald, Natalie Marx and Dr. Thomas Stuttaford explored how our health is balanced between conventional and complementary medicine and food, and there were very lively questions from the floor.

We hope to build on last year's success with our Seminar 2008 'From Hieroglyphics to Texting – Getting the Message Across'. Details will shortly appear on our website together with a downloadable booking form. May I suggest that this year you buy your tickets early to avoid disappointment!

AJWO is a wonderful organisation and Council meetings are a pleasure to Chair. I have always appreciated the friendly atmosphere and how good we are at coming together to co-operate on topics of mutual interest. Because of the need for security and the economic use of premises, some of our affiliates are finding it more difficult to offer a venue for our council meetings. I thank those organisations that have been able to host us so admirably during this year.

I have been very fortunate in working with a great team. I came into office with greater speed than anticipated and I will be forever indebted to Louise for seeing me through the first few months and always being available to give sound and friendly advice. Joyce continues to be a most effective treasurer and amazingly managed to keep her cool when an untimely postal strike contrived to sabotage our Seminar ticket sales. Rita has now come to the end of her term of office and I thank her for being a most efficient secretary and a mine of useful information. And finally we were all delighted when Penny Conway agreed to join the Honorary Officers earlier this year, bringing with her a wealth of experience.

If this were a school report there would be only one subject for which we would get 'must try harder' and that subject is publicity. I always wear my beautiful AJWO badge and would urge you all to do likewise. They are very reasonable at only £3 each and Joyce has them with her today. We continue to hand out our leaflets and send our cards for all occasions but we still face an uphill battle. It has been suggested that we have a publicity poster for organisations and synagogues to display on their notice boards. These will shortly be available for downloading from our website and I would ask you to please spread these around for all to see.

I've heard it said that the first year in the Chair is the hardest and the second the most enjoyable. It has not been an easy task to follow in the footsteps of such exceptional past Chairmen but I have actually found it most enjoyable. That being the case, I cannot wait to find out how much better my second year will be and I thank all our Council Members for being such a delight to work with.