

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT AGM JUNE 2009

Another busy year has flown by and once again I stand here giving my Annual Report.

I said last year that one of the great pleasures of being Chairman of AJWO is the wonderful opportunity it affords to represent our organisation at various events and to meet with people from all different walks of life. And this pleasure continues. On your behalf I have once again accepted a number of invitations and always use my very best endeavours to bring our organisation to the notice of as many people as possible.

In July I was invited by Harriet Harman and the Government Equalities Office to an evening reception at Admiralty House. The purpose of the meeting was to encourage more women to take public appointments and also to raise the very low percentage of Black and Ethnic Women appointed. A number of head-hunters were also invited. I very much regret that I wasn't offered a wonderful position with unlimited expenses and allowances but it did prove to be an ideal opportunity for networking.

In November I was invited by the West London Synagogue to a special service to mark the installation of the new Lord Mayor of London, Alderman Ian Luder. Unfortunately it was not possible for me to attend and on this occasion we were most admirably represented by Valerie Bello.

As Chairman of AJWO I participated in a meeting of the Family and Social Issues Focus Group of the Jewish Women's Review Task Force. The meeting proved to be very productive and I have since been invited to a Reception on 23rd June to launch the 2009 report - 'Connection, Continuity and Community: British Jewish Women Speak Out'.

In December I attended the Chanukah Reception hosted by David Miliband at Lancaster House. Present were the Chief Rabbi, Henry Grunwald and other leaders from the Community and I am always delighted that AJWO takes its rightful place at these communal events.

Once again I was invited to join in the opening ceremony of the Northwood Holocaust Memorial Day Event. Rabbi Plancy and Rabbi Goldstein welcomed the students and guests and Holocaust survivor Ziggi Shipper told his mesmerising story of survival. This was followed by various workshops and concluded with a candle lighting ceremony. A truly successful enterprise of co-operation by an Orthodox and a Liberal Synagogue and an example for the rest of our leaders.

It was my pleasure to represent AJWO at the launch of Jewish Women's Week when their Guest Speaker gave good advice to help collectors achieve continued success during this economic downturn.

I also attended a one-day Conference held by the Voice of the Listener and Viewer on 'Making the Most of New Technology'.

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. Penelope Conway and I have attended their Leadership Training Days and we also attended a conference for Jewish and Muslim Women. In addition many AJWO Council members joined in a visit to the Museum of Immigration at what was the Princelet Street Synagogue. I personally find these events a truly wonderful way of mixing with like-minded women from many different faiths. Everyone comes together in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

We participate fully in our affiliation to the National Council of Women. I would like to thank all our Policy Committee representatives for their excellent reports which often give rise to much discussion at Council Meetings. For many years June Cowan has given us a most detailed resumé of the proceedings at the Annual Conference but unfortunately this year she was unwell and unable to attend. As Chairman of AJWO, I always make a particular point of attending all their Affiliate meetings. Currently I am taking a keen interest in their recent initiative to encourage inter-generational co-operation by successfully forging links between themselves and sixth form young women.

We continue to support the Women's National Commission. Our Secretary, Marilyn Lehmann, attended a meeting which provided information about the UK's commitments and activities at the United Nations regarding the status of women, and the actions being taken to eliminate discrimination against women. Many of our Council members acted on an appeal from the WNC to contact their MEPs asking them to support the European Parliament Declaration on Violence against Women. I was subsequently delighted to be able to report that this Declaration was adopted by the European Parliament, over 400 MEPs having signed.

I am delighted that Louise Freedman agreed to be re-elected as our Deputy at the Board of Deputies and she certainly makes sure that we are kept most fully informed and up to date with all its activities.

Most correspondence is now carried out by email and I regularly forward to you communications of interest that are received in this manner. These include great missives from the London Civic Forum, the Women's National Commission and the monthly Noticeboard from the National Council of Women amongst many other organisations. Indeed, some of you may consider that I forward too much but I do like to keep you all informed. Some mail still does arrive by post and we are ever grateful to our friends of the League of Jewish Women for allowing us to use their address as a postbox and for their assistance in forwarding mail.

Our Annual Seminar continues to be as popular and successful as ever. Last year's topic 'From Hieroglyphics to Texting' received many compliments and our three speakers, Professor David Jacques, Lorna Fitzsimons and Ruth Dudley Edwards, explored the topic from three completely different perspectives. However, I must admit to feeling just a little worried when, minutes before she was due to speak, Ruth Dudley Edwards decided to change the content of her talk to one exploring the effects of propaganda!

I hope to build on last year's success with our Seminar 2009 : 'Away with Depression – Is Laughter the Best Medicine?' In view of the current uncertain climate, both economically and morally, this topic should prove of great interest and, once again, our panel of three speakers will each address the subject from a different perspective. The flyer, incorporating a downloadable booking form, will shortly appear on our website. Please go forth and sell tickets to your family, friends and colleagues!

I said last year that that if this were a school report there would be only one subject for which we would get 'must try harder'. That subject is publicity and I promised then to produce a publicity poster for AJWO. Well here it is. I hope you will find it a useful tool in publicising our organisation, and it will be permanently available for downloading from our website. Please ensure they are put up on the notice boards in Affiliate offices, synagogues and other communal premises.

With the hands on computer skills of David Clark, our computer whiz-kid, I continue to keep our website fully updated and I always encourage people to log on to find out more about our Organisation. Do take another look – you may even see a photo of yourself.

For some time now, several of our Affiliates have been under-represented on Council and I am delighted to report that, admittedly with some perseverance on my part, most are now fully represented, thus enabling us to function at our full potential. Our new Council members are Judy Frankel from B'nai B'rith; Evelyn Isaacs from Emunah; Sylvia Graham from Sephardi Women; Jackie Gordon from Wizo; Mildred Levison and Liz Gould from Jewish Women's Aid and Roslyn Wagman and Susan Roffman from Ort. Ladies, welcome to AJWO.

Chairing this cross-communal organisation is an absolute pleasure and I always appreciate the friendly atmosphere and just how good we are at coming together on topics of mutual interest. Each of our Affiliates has the opportunity to report on its activities and to offer for discussion any problems it may be encountering. In other words, we all come together for the greater good, and that is the joy of AJWO.

I have been most fortunate once again to have worked with a great team. My two vice-chairmen, Penelope Conway and Sharron Phillips, can always be depended upon to give valuable support and practical help. Our new Secretary, Marilyn Lehmann, often tells me how much she enjoys being part of AJWO and we in turn are very grateful for the way in which she has quickly settled into the position and has taken up and continued the smooth running of all our administrative work. But the main accolade today must go to Joyce Rose who, having been Hon. Treasurer for more than twenty years, has decided that the time has now come for her to retire. During all this time she always ensured that our finances have been kept in good order and has taken responsibility for the smooth running of our Seminar ticket sales. Joyce has always been a most valuable member of the Honorary Officers' team and her presence and wise counsel will be greatly missed.

And lastly I would like to thank all my colleagues on the Council for their unfailing support and encouragement. Together we continue to ensure that AJWO remains a vibrant and modern organisation for women across the Jewish spectrum.