

**Sharon Christopher**

**President's Report**

**IWF Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) Chapter**

***What a year it has been!***

To think that it is a little over a year ago we were at IWF sister member, Anya Schnoor's home toasting to the future of this Trinidad and Tobago Chapter of the International Women's Forum. And what a year this has been! While it is the norm for fledging groups to get up and running to establish a public presence and create national attention, we have opted to build our strength differently – through sisterhood and bonding.

The first year for the T&T Chapter was a lesson in support. Visiting sister members from Miami, Toni Randall and Jamaica's Minna Israel and Patsy Latchman Atterbury stood with us at our first meeting when the local Chapter was formed. The following month, half of our membership attended the IWF's World Leadership Conference in Atlanta. We truly appreciated the warm and hospitality provided by our global sisters all under the IWF umbrella. Additionally I felt deeply honoured to be part of the Presidents Meeting in Atlanta.

**NOVEMBER**

Back in T&T we have had our milestones to acknowledge. Our first meeting of the Executive Committee was held on November 05<sup>th</sup> at the President's workplace. At this meeting, we confirmed the establishment of this committee, our by-laws and our bank account. More importantly and after much discussion, we decided that our first year would be spent bonding with each other and building our strength as a team. We decided that by educating ourselves on issues which directly impact our small twin island nation and our own lives, we can then decide to take the appropriate actions in the future as a Chapter as necessary.

**DECEMBER**

At Christmas we had our first networking event at sister Jacqueline Quamina's residence. The Trinidad festiveness, mixed with the spirit of goodwill, was the ideal backdrop to get to know each other.

Mind you, when we meet we have a lot to say. Contrary to what some may think, the laughter heard also gave way to serious tones as we discussed matters that affect us as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and how we can contribute to make our country a better place for women professionals and set an example for those who walk behind.

## **MARCH**

Our next membership meeting took place on March 25<sup>th</sup> and we dove straight into discussing a disturbing issue that continued to make news headlines – domestic violence. Under the theme “The Face of Domestic Abuse has Changed,” sister Dr. Patricia Elder moderated a discourse led by Clinical Psychologist Dr Natalie Humphrey and Attorney at Law Lynette Seebaran-Suite.

Sister members gained insight on how to help women recognize if they were being abused and to provide the avenues and tools to change those situations.

## **MAY**

During this period, our sister members Dr. Patricia Elder, Pat Kong Ting and Maria Bartholomew represented our Chapter at the Cornerstone Conference in South Africa. Sister member, Giselle Marfleet also led the charge in organizing a donation of a blanket from our country for IWF’s international drive to help those in need.

## **JUNE**

Because of the pressing demands of our sister members, we were unable to meet as a large group, but a few of us were able to meet over drinks. At this meeting we discussed the issues we would like addressed during the months leading up to the IWF Boston Conference. We concluded by setting the agendas and meetings during this period. It worked out to be quite a productive meeting.

## **JULY**

On July 29<sup>th</sup>, our sister Sandra Chin Yuen Kee was hostess to another powerful membership meeting. This time, our guest, attorney Senator Ian Roach spoke about his experience in South Africa as legal adviser to the ruling ANC party when global icon and apartheid fighter Nelson Mandela was President. He also discussed opportunities for women executives in the Caribbean to establish links with our sisters in similar fields within the African Continent.

Our sisters who had been to the South African Conference also reported on their experiences, with words like “spiritual” and “overwhelming” taking front and centre stage.

## **AUGUST**

On August 26<sup>th</sup>, our sister Anya Schnoor hosted us. Guests at this meeting interacted with well-known art curator and social activist Charlotte Elias who discussed her

NGO's Art Connect – a project that changes the lives of children in at-risk areas through exposing them to art. We had the opportunity to meet a young girl whose life had been changed as a result of being involved in this project. After entering the project at the age of 13, this 16 year old stated that the project enabled her to create a vision for her life and belief that she can achieve anything she wanted. We are confident that she will become a successful woman.

Members also celebrated my birthday with a surprise birthday cake (absolutely delicious) and champagne. I was truly touched.

## **SEPTEMBER**

On September 30<sup>th</sup> we met at our sister member Rani Narace's home. This meeting came soon after our country faced several weeks of what can only be described as a bruising general election campaign and many of us felt that we were suffering from election burnout. Therefore we decided to change our topic for discussion from elections to something else. Nevertheless, we felt that the recent national event still lingered in our minds and therefore made us want to reflect upon where we are as a nation, we realised that as individuals and as a group, we cannot move forward if we do not let go of aspects of our past. Therefore our discussion topic at this meeting was on the issue of 'Letting Go'.

## **OCTOBER**

We wound down our first year, the same way we started - by attending the World Leadership Conference in Boston. Once again at least half of our members were in attendance. It was indeed an emotional experience to walk out onto the stage and to be greeted by the Trinidad and Tobago Chapter cheering section, ably assisted by our Jamaican sisters! I am grateful that IWF Global decided to honour me along with other IWF sisters from around the world, for an Award entitled, "Women Who Make a Difference 2015". I am even more grateful that so many of you were with me in Boston when I received this award.

## **NOVEMBER**

A meeting of the Executive Committee was held on November 17, 2015. At the meeting we undertook a comprehensive review of the bye laws.

A copy of these bye laws will be submitted to you before the January meeting so that we could have them ratified at that meeting.

## **DECEMBER**

In this month of giving, our Chapter donated hampers to the young women of the Sophia House.

Our special thanks to Sandra Chin Yuen Kee, who oversaw the purchasing and the packaging of the fourteen (14) hampers.

Maybe we will be able to establish a relationship with this home for young women at risk and assist in other ways going forward.

### ***Congratulations***

I end this report on a note of congratulations to four sisters who have made another step in their careers. Sister Dr Gillian Paul was appointed President at College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTATT). The first woman to hold this position. Sister Jacqueline Quamina was promoted to the position of Executive Director of Republic Bank, which is the largest commercial bank in Trinidad and Tobago. Sister Dr. Patricia Elder has been selected among a community of international psychologists and appointed as a Peer Reviewer for the Council on Accreditation (COA). And Sister Indu Sharma was recently appointed to the Board of Education Facilities Company Ltd.

We wish you all the best in your new positions.

As IWF T&T Chapter enters year two, what do we do next? At our next meeting we will have to have a full discussion around this. This meeting will be held on January 13, 2016 at Gisele Marfleet's home situated at 21 Grenada Avenue, Federation Park, commencing at 5:30p.m.

What I do know for sure that whatever we decide with respect to the way forward, the basis of it must be a desire to continue to grow and build our chapter, our sisters, our communities, our country and our world.