



## **International Federation of Business & Professional Women Celebrate 60 years of Consultative Status to the United Nations**

By  
Leigh Henderson  
Editor, *Spyglass*



Photo caption: Dr. Chonchanok (Nok) Viravan, President (third from left), gets assistance from present and past members of the organization's Executive Board to cut the 'birthday' cake.

The International Federation of Business & Professional Women (BPW) has affiliates in 80 countries on five continents. Founded in 1930, it earned consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council Statistics in 1947. Like other women's organizations, BPW lobbied for the creation of the Commission on the Status of Women. During the current 51st annual gathering, BPW members are part of the 12,000 delegates to address the primary theme, "The Elimination of All

Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child."

The mission of BPW is to contribute to society by enabling women to sustain themselves economically. The goal is daunting. According to statistics from the United States Agency for International Development, of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty globally, 70% are women and children. Two-thirds of the 876 million illiterate individuals worldwide are women, two-thirds of the 125 million school-aged children who are not attending school worldwide are girls, and girls are less likely to complete school than boys.

Elizabeth Vanarden, US, keeps current with politics reading the BPW/USA Legislative Hotline. In it was the news that the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee approved a resolution supporting the goals of International Women's Day authored by Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL). Vanarden feels that women have gained political power. There are still women qualified to run but are reluctant to step forward. They need much more support from other women.

How is IWD celebrated around the world?

Dr. Antoinette Ruegg, immediate past President- BPW International, Switzerland

There are many celebrations for IWD at the initiation of BPW clubs that include workshops and conferences. No point of discussion: a woman has her professional life! Women are strong on grass roots and small group activities. What we need is to be top down with experts. We don't seem to have enough expertise for change. BPW is great; we need to be more like the World Wildlife Fund, an organized global initiative.

Hon. Modupe Olaiya, BPW President, Nigeria

On IWD we give seminars, many on health care. We offer HIV screenings and we're introducing PAP smears. We just spoke with someone who can provide Gardasil, a vaccine for young girls against certain types of the human papillomavirus (HPV). The big change in our country is that women hold government offices. At the next election, we might have the first woman governor in Nigeria. We have a woman as Minister of Finance and a Minister of Mineral Resources. The African Union protocol is that before 2020, there is to be a 50/50 representation of female and male leaders.

Irina Arsentieva, BPW President, Russia

March 8 is dedicated completely to women. We participate in meetings dedicated to the support of women in the world. The most dramatic change in my lifetime is meeting women who understand each other, especially the BPW. We need to continue to grow the status of women.

Liisa Kiianlinna, BPW, Finland

Our President Tarja Kaarina Halonen is a woman; a good role model for all of us. We have 2,000 members of BPW in my country. Yes, we have a mandate that 40% of governing board representation needs to be female. I want real equality not just what's written on paper. Men don't treat equality seriously. Women still get 80% of the salary that men do.

Dr. AnnaRosa Colangelo, First Vice President-BPW International, Belgium

IWD is not a national holiday but there are conferences on the day. The most dramatic change in my lifetime is the mentality of men, specifically the awareness men now have of the importance of family. The major growth area for equality is with men – specifically for men to adjust to women being in the workplace, in parliament, in the world as equals.

Maria Sweigart, BPW, Mexico

IWD is a national holiday. We host empowerment meetings for women and we host a dinner. The most dramatic change in my lifetime is that now it is a crime in Mexico to abuse women – physically and emotionally. Women need to believe that they are worth being treated with dignity and respect. They need to make men value them.

For more information on the work of BPW and to find a local chapter, go to <http://www.bpw-international.org>.