



## The Hegg Hoffet Fund for Displaced Women Graduates

30<sup>th</sup> IFUW Conference, Mexico City  
August 5, 2010

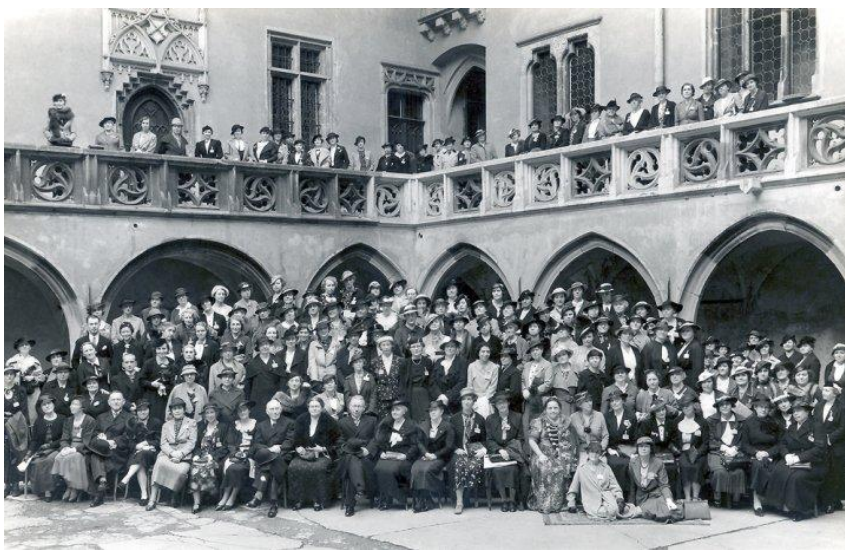
Our personal touch makes a difference!

**Notes for presentation to the 30<sup>th</sup> IFUW Conference in Mexico City, August 2010, on the history and current work of the Hegg Hoffet Fund and Committee. Prepared by Marian Ennis, Convener.**

Historical data gleaned from the Council and Conference minutes kept at the IFUW Head Office in Geneva, and from the Hegg-Hoffet Fund Information Paper prepared by Convener Dr. Suzanne Hegg in 1992.

- 1936, 20<sup>th</sup> Council at Cracow set up The Emergency Fund to help university women who had been deprived of the right to work, or forced to leave their native countries. Prior to 1939, the British Federation has already set up a Special Refugee Committee and the IFUW Office (located in England at that time), "having neither authority nor adequate provision for dealing with applications for assistance, passed all enquiries on to the British Committee, so as to ensure action being taken as promptly as possible.

## IFUW Conference, Cracow, Poland



1936

- 1938, London, a resolution was passed by Council authorizing the Board to appoint a Special Committee to “consider, in conjunction with other organizations involved in this work, assistance for university women who are in need because of the emergency of the present time, and to render aid as far as possible.” A Mrs. Osborn was the convener (probably from the British Federation).

- 1939, Australian Head Office in Adelaide offered assistance to graduate women victims of the pogroms in Germany and Austria. About 10% of applications for immigration to Australia were accepted by their government, on the condition that the women “would be willing to do domestic work for an indefinite period”. Immigrants under 35 were preferred.

The New Zealand Federation also worked to help applicants immigrate. “Although... adaptability and the courage to face a new life of physical exertion will be required of them, there is a chance of finding openings for architects, secretaries, nurses, etc.” Sadly, things have not changed that much for some graduate refugees today.

AAUW drew up a report on U.S. Immigration laws and procedures to assist applicants, and undertook an educational campaign among their own members. The French Association helped many refugees from the Spanish Civil War. “The Toulouse Branch opened a home for about 250 Spanish university women and their families, and every teacher gives one day’s salary a month towards its upkeep.”

In 1940, a separate War Relief Fund was set up by the IFUW Officers, and administered by the Emergency Committee under Mrs. Osborn, until 1946. Several graduate women were assisted to emigrate to South American countries, and the Mexican Association helped several Spanish refugees. In 1942, the Indian Association assisted evacuees driven out by advancing armies in Far East.

From 1940 to 1946, major efforts were made by NFA’s to assist graduate women refugees who arrived in countries such as Britain, France, Sweden, Switzerland, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Belgium, Finland, U.S.A., Canada, South Africa, and Palestine. The Irish and Norwegian Associations, as well as many individual members, also made donations to the Funds for Emergency Assistance and War Relief. In 1946, several university women who had been in concentration camps were invited for holidays to rest and regain their health in Switzerland, Britain, and Sweden. The U.S. and Britain supplied badly needed books and professional equipment to help some women return to professional work.

## Why a “Special” Committee?

### Special Committee

- ▶ Functional roles; need well-qualified people appointed for the ‘one-on-one’ confidential work with distressed women
- ▶ Separate bank account with transactions made by Head Office on request. All funds used for recipients, not admin.
- ▶ Flexible. Reactive changes can be made faster by the Board in concert with the Committee

### Standing Committee

- ▶ Mostly elected; more focus on policy development and the operations of IFUW as an entire organization
- ▶ Spending is determined by overall IFUW triennial budget
- ▶ Three-year terms can make changes in priorities or duties a slower process

Travel bursaries provided by the Australian, Canadian, and British Federations, and grants for study in the U.S. provided by the American Association, enabled university women to take refresher courses or study abroad, to bring themselves up to date in their fields and regain their health. Food rationing was still in place in many areas of Europe for several years after WWII ended. Canadian members sent many cartons of clothing, as many refugees had very little that was decent to wear, and no money to purchase clothes.

In 1946, the Council held in London passed a regulation to amalgamate the Emergency Assistance and War Relief Funds, and that the Committee administering the combined fund would be known as the "IFUW Relief Committee". The committee recommended that in view of the generous help given by NFA's from the U.S., Canada, Australia and South Africa, that these NFA's be invited to nominate representatives to the Committee (which at that time had five members). At the 1947 Conference, Dr. Marie Van der Kolf of the Netherlands became the new Committee Convener.

The terms of reference "To deal with applications from university women in distress as a result of war or political upheavals, and to allocate grants towards training or temporary assistance", were similar to what we have today, except that displacement due to natural disasters is also covered nowadays. However, at that time "temporary assistance" included money for clothing, heat, furniture, food, medicines, vitamins, special diets, and rest cures.

Donors were assured that all moneys would be used solely for the relief of the women, with the IFUW office covering any administrative expenses, and that practice continues today.

Life in the DP Camps:



**Refugees eating in a Displaced Persons Camp**

► Photo credit: The International School for Holocaust Studies

"Their detachment from real sources of livelihood, their lack of independence and their dependence on the aid institutions blunted their ability to distinguish between the essential and the incidental, between reality and imagination..." From: Yachil, Chaim, "The Activity of the Palestinian Mission to She'arit Hapleta 1945- 1949" (Part 2), in: Yalkut Moreshet, Mordechai Anielewicz Study and Research Centre, Tel Aviv, Vol. 31, 1981, p. 172

Aid to displaced university women living in these camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy was a major focus of the Relief Fund from 1946 through the 1950's to 1970's. The younger women gradually got jobs and moved out of the camps, but many of them were too old or ill to ever work again, and quite a few suffered from mental health problems after their horrific experiences. Most camps were finally closed by 1964, but the resettlement of the women into tiny one-room apartments with little furniture, while improving their privacy, increased their isolation and their costs. Their subsistence budgets could not handle any unexpected expenses or health problems.

"It is not uncommon to see all the tenants in this long building awake in screams from nightmares of their horrifying past." Source: Miriam Raz-Zonshein, *Birds in Black and White* [Hebrew], Moreshet Yad Vashem, Tel Aviv 2002, pp. 175-176.

It was under these circumstances that in 1947 Committee member Mme. Blanche Hegg-Hoffet of Switzerland began her work with the Preparatory Commission of the International Relief Organization, (later replaced by the High Commission for Refugees) and began meeting with some of the approximately ten thousand university women who were awaiting resettlement. She built up a network of contacts among NGO's and welfare workers that would be very useful to her over the years, and made many visits to Germany to keep a personal eye on the situation of these women. The German Federation also offered valuable help with difficult legal questions, such as establishing the place of domicile for the purpose of drawing financial assistance, as well as visiting refugees and reporting to the Committee on their needs.

Many NFA's and individual UW members sponsored over 150 refugee graduate women (most of whom came from Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries) as their "filleules" (goddaughters) for many years, donating money for their support, writing to them and sending CARE packages, books and professional periodicals, and Christmas gifts. Canadian and Swedish members sent many cartons of clothing, as often refugees had very little that was decent to wear, and no money to purchase clothes. Even in 1998 one elderly "goddaughter" was still living and being assisted by the Fund.

In 1950, Mme Hegg-Hoffett became the convener of the Special Committee and served in this role for 17 years. She reported that among those refugees able to work, the intellectuals had the least hope of professional employment, and when they did succeed in emigrating they needed (more than others) friendly help, and above all introductions to men and women with similar intellectual interests, in order to adjust to their new social conditions. NFA's were encouraged by IFUW to invite these women to their meetings and offer them some special non-paying form of membership.

This need is still great among displaced graduate women today, and some of our applicants report that the moral support offered by the Committee and various NFA branches is worth just as much (if not more) to them than the little bit of financial help they receive.

The Israel Federation had a program of concerted action in aid of university women among the stream of immigrants to Israel, and over the years, on the recommendation of the Federation, the Fund has supplied grants for several refugee women in Israel. We always appreciate getting applications from candidates identified by UW branches, because it makes vetting the information so much easier, and we know that there will be followup support for the grantee. Therefore we urge every NFA and their local branches to keep in touch with the refugee and immigration organizations in their area, so that qualified candidates can be made aware of our grants.

Wars and political upheavals continued to be an issue. In 1955, the Cultural Relations Committee sent medical supplies and other assistance to Korea, while gift coupons and medical textbooks were sent to Greece. The German Federation assisted refugees from the Eastern Zone. In 1956 there was a massive exodus of refugees from Hungary, most of whom arrived in Austria, and were helped by funds raised through a special appeal to the NFA's. Many of them were younger and their careers had only been briefly interrupted, so they resettled more quickly into other countries, where the local UW associations offered them adaptation support.

1960's: Over twenty bursaries and housing grants were awarded to enable Chinese refugee university women in Hong Kong to complete degrees. A number of national associations appoint a member to correspond regularly with the Relief Committee, in order to maintain continuity. The committee tried, but was unable, to establish contacts to help Vietnamese university women during that war. The Committee sent out an average of 600 letters per year. Email makes this task much easier and cheaper nowadays.

## Tributes to Blanche Hegg Hoffet

- ▶ 1961: IFUW VP Miss I. Hilton put on record the gratitude felt by the whole of IFUW for Mme. Hegg Hoffet who had "given heart, head, time and money to this work of selfless devotion and service which must be unequalled in the history of the Federation".
- ▶ 1965: "All members of IFUW will add to this [Relief Committee report] their warm acknowledgment of the great debt we all owe to Mrs. Hegg, whose personal devotion enables us to fulfil some of the service we owe to our friends whose circumstances, both material and spiritual, are so much less fortunate than our own."
- ▶ 1968: The 16<sup>th</sup> Conference held in Karlsruhe unanimously voted to adopt in future the name of 'Hegg-Hoffet Relief Fund' in honour of the many years of devoted service given by Mme. Hegg, who has so often been called "the conscience of the IFUW."

1968: Blanche Hegg-Hoffet retires as convener after over 17 years, but continues to serve as an advisor to the Committee, which has been renamed in her honor. New convener is Mme. H  l  ne Meyer-Borel from Switzerland, who served for 18 years (to 1986).

## Various Fundraising Efforts

- ▶ Since 1938: Collections frequently taken at Council meetings.
- ▶ Many national associations donate money, sponsor "filleules"
- ▶ 1962: German Association sells Japanese postcards
- ▶ Swiss Federation votes to allocate 1 SF per member per year of their dues to the Relief Committee; this continues for many years
- ▶ 1964: Impromptu Auction. Miss Salceda offers some Mexican jewellery for sale, inspiring Council attendees to donate items
- ▶ 1965: First Relief Shop held at 15<sup>th</sup> Conference in Brisbane
- ▶ Ongoing: Local and regional social events, auctions, and shops



1980s and 90's. Mary Cherneskey of the Canadian Federation, a correspondent with the Committee, worked for many years to keep the HH Fund "top of mind" among CFUW members, and collected many donations to remit to the Fund, until about 2004. In most years, the Canadian Federation (including individual members) is the biggest annual donor. Other regular donations come from Switzerland, Britain, and the Netherlands. Funds were sent to help an ailing UW member in Uganda. However, even with extra money, some of the supplies she needed were simply not available for purchase in her city.

1986: Dr. Suzanne Hegg becomes the Convener, and serves until 1992. She was succeeded by Marian Nauta Blijham of the Netherlands, who served for 12 years, until 2004.

1989: refugees from Romania, Afghanistan, and Chile were assisted.

## The IFUW Hegg Hoffet Shop



Perth, Australia August 2004

The general feeling of the Committee has been that although we cannot help large numbers of refugees, our personalized service to individual women makes the difference between despair and hope, and deals with their distinct needs in the way best calculated to assist their adaptation, and for that reason our program is a valuable addition to those offered by large aid organizations.

HH newsletters and brochures were sent out to NFA's and correspondence contacts, to keep them abreast of activities.

More African refugee women were being assisted to adapt to their new residences in Europe. The turbulent situation in former Yugoslavia and in the Middle East led to more refugees from those areas being supported.

2001: The Fund acted as intermediary for funds collected and passed on to the Turkish Association, to help female students and graduates whose lives had been disrupted by the major earthquake.

2000's: several refugees from the Middle East, Africa, and South America, now living in Canada or the U.S., received assistance. Anne and I worked with a doctor in France. I personally met with three recipients in Vancouver, and keep in touch with another in Washington State, whom I hope to meet next time I'm down there. I'm in regular contact with one in Latvia, and keep in touch with former recipients once a year. Winnipeg Club mentored a South American refugee for several years, and Newfoundland Club member worked with one from the Middle East. Egyptian Association members communicated by phone and email with a Sudanese refugee. Christel Moor met with a refugee in England.

Mentoring Report from Marion Jones, AFUW Queensland, Australia:

20 December 2005	XX, a refugee graduate woman from Africa living in Queensland, applied directly to the HH Fund (she had been given a brochure in a multicultural community office). The Convener asked me to find someone who would meet with her, assess her situation and inform the Fund about her plans, and I volunteered.
Late December 2005	Dalma Jacobs and I took her to lunch and chatted with her. We were both impressed with her determination to succeed. We established that she was a strict Muslim whose clothing covered her body but not her face. At that time, she had collected info from a private College which offered courses to improve computer, business and administrative skills. The College wanted a very large deposit.
Early Jan. 06	I tried to contact the College but found that it had closed. Luckily, no deposit had been paid.
January 2006	XX and I visited several business colleges offering the type of course that she required to acquire the technical skills needed to work in Australia. We talked to the teachers and then compared courses, prices and probable outcomes.
Late January 2006	We chose one whose Outline was: <i>Students will become proficient in Administration Skills, Workplace relations, Communication, Computers, Finance and Technology. Students will have access to work experience and industry placement. Job placement is also a service for all of our graduates.</i> We were particularly pleased that she would be offered job placement/s. The Hegg Hoffet Fund gave her a grant for her tuition at this College.
February - May 2006	She applied herself diligently to the course, and agreed to my being provided with regular updates on her progress. She finished the course with distinction. I kept the HH Fund informed of her progress.
June 2006	XX applied for many jobs and had many interviews. Employers liked her CV but as soon as she appeared in traditional Muslim dress, there always seemed to be another requirement which was not in the original selection criteria.
July 2006	I asked our AFUW-Q membership if anyone knew of positions for XX. A temporary position was offered in the state public service. Since then she has successfully applied to become a permanent staff member.
2006-2010	XX is well regarded by her line managers and workmates. She continues to succeed in the Queensland public service. Initially, I paid for her AFUWQ membership for several years. Although she is no longer a member, she holds the organisation in high regard as it is through it that she has been able to build herself a successful and satisfying life in Australia. She has attended its Christmas Parties and functions. XX has become part of my family, joining us for special occasions and for Easter and Christmas. She and I meet about once a month for lunch and a chat; I have discovered many halal restaurants in Brisbane.
2010	XX is now financially independent, owns and drives a car and has made good friendships. She remains devoted to her religion, teaches classes at the mosque every Saturday morning but also enjoys Australian pleasures. I believe that the HH Funds and my contributions have been well used.



Marion Jones, Peita Chesters, refugee member

Modeling gowns to promote AFUW Queensland's academic dress hire service at an International Women's Day event in Brisbane attended by 1500 people.

Wars and political upheavals around the world do not seem likely to end any time in the near future, and the numbers of refugees are increasing. In South Africa, for example, there are hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers, and many of our recent applications come from that country.

The number of women who are able to attend university is much greater nowadays than it was in the 1930's, so due to limited funds, we are not able to offer ongoing supplementary living expenses to every graduate refugee. We focus our efforts on short-term help to get their credentials evaluated, and upgrade their language and job skills with an aim to obtaining employment.

## Future of the Hegg Hoffet Fund

- ▶ Liaise with UN High Commission for Refugees
- ▶ Connect with other Women's organizations
- ▶ Network via Facebook, Twitter, links to our website
- ▶ Inspire NFA's/branches in refugee-receiving countries to locate and support applicants
- ▶ Keep the "conscience of IFUW" motivating us to reach out to displaced women graduates

Our personal touch makes a difference!

## IFUW Special Committee for the Hegg Hoffet Fund



Marian Ennis, Canada  
Convener



### 2007-2010 Members:

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