



**FINAL MINUTES OF THE 35TH TRIENNIAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF
GRADUATE WOMEN INTERNATIONAL
HELD AT THE MULUNGUSHI INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE,
LUSAKA, ZAMBIA**

DAY ONE: 11 SEPTEMBER 2025

1. Formal Opening and Welcome

The 35th Triennial General Assembly of Graduate Women International (GWI) was formally opened in Lusaka, Zambia, with over 130 delegates from 18 countries in attendance. The event was hosted by Graduate Women Zambia (GWZ) and convened under the theme:

“Building the Future: Integrating Culture, Education and Empowerment for Sustainability.”

The Director of Programmes, Ms Kunda Mando called the house to order.

2. National Anthem

The General Assembly commenced with the Zambian National Anthem sung by the University of Zambia Choir. This was followed by the GWI song presented by Chongwe District School. A recorded version of the AU Song was played. The Chongwe School children also presented a poem. Entertainment was provided by Bantu Diwo group, which performed traditional dances.

3. Introduction Proceedings of High-Table Dignitaries

The High table dignitaries were introduced by the GWZ LAC Director of Programmes.

4. Welcome from the GWI President

The GWI President Patrice Wellesly-Cole made welcoming remarks and reminded the delegates that the theme was: **Building the Future: Integrating Culture, Education, and Empowerment for Sustainability**. With a focus on strengthening education systems through the lens of integrated cultural education relevance, the public conference explored key global issues through five interrelated sub-themes. The President thanked the GWZ NFA for hosting the 35th Triennial, and community leaders who are shaping the world in classrooms, boardrooms, and grassroots movements. She emphasised the fact that women are the keepers and carriers of culture who must ensure culture evolves with dignity, equity and relevance.

5. Welcome Address: Graduate Women Zambia President

Dr. Annie Musonda welcomed all the delegates and stated that GWZ is not only about today's leadership but about preparing the next generation. She noted that GWZ was involved in mentoring student volunteers and graduates in leadership. She informed the delegates that there would be an opportunity for them to see firsthand a project in Chongwe where over 200 girls are set to benefit from educational and leadership opportunities.

She encouraged the delegates to take advantage of the Zambian hospitality and enjoy some touristic activities after the conference. She stated that GWZ was very excited to be the second African country after South Africa to host a GWI Triennial General Assembly and Conference and announced that the Local Arrangements Committee (LAC) had organised thought-provoking keynote speeches and conference papers for day 3.

6. Official Opening and Keynote by Guest of Honour Prof. Patricia Mukwato

Prof. Patricia Mukwato, the Guest of honour, made the official opening address. Thereafter the programme proceeded as planned with the Business Sessions 1 and 2 and voting for President, Vice-Presidents and Treasurer.

7. Vote of thanks by LAC Chairperson

Prof. Wilma Nchito, the Local Arrangements Committee (LAC) Chairperson thanked the guest of honour and the GWI Board, led by the President Patrice Wellesley-Cole, for trusting them with the responsibility of planning and hosting the Triennial and for walking them through the process of organising the Triennial. The chair thanked the GWZ Board

for their support and she thanked all the 19 members of the LAC for their dedication and for the support rendered to her in her role as LAC chairperson. She thanked all the sponsors and volunteers. She ended by thanking all the delegates who had travelled from far and wide to come to Zambia, many coming to Africa for the first time. She assured the delegates that everything had been put in place to ensure that they had a pleasant stay in Lusaka and Zambia as a whole and she wished the delegates a fruitful 35th Triennial.

Business Session 1

President Patrice Wellesly-Cole called the meeting to order and opened the first Business Session.

1. Introduction of Delegates, GA members and guests

The Assembly acknowledged the presence of:

- Ministers and Permanent Secretaries
- Members of the GWI Board and Committees
- Distinguished invited speakers
- Partners, sponsors, and supporters
- Delegates from NFAs across 18 countries Australia, Bolivia, Canada, Egypt, Fiji, Ghana, Great Britain, Ireland & Northern Ireland, Japan, Lithuania, New Zealand, Nigeria, Netherlands, Scotland, Sierra Leone, Switzerland, USA and Zambia

Special recognition was given to first-time attendees and young members, whose presence signalled a vibrant future for GWI.

2. Introduction of GA functionaries and staff

The Chair noted the Protocol Advisors for the Triennial GA were Linda Sestock and Terry Oudraad. The Credentials Committee was Chaired by Cat Sutherland and included Sahar Gamal, Lynne Kent and Carrie de Silva. Lynne Kent recused herself from the Committee during the portion of the General Assembly for elections for the Board of Officers as a she was a Board candidate.

3. Apologies and Remembrances

The Assembly acknowledged the contributions of leaders who could not attend in person, including some who have served GWI for many years. The importance of leadership continuity and mentorship was emphasized, especially in supporting young professionals and returning members.

She invited everyone to acknowledge the generosity of the organizers and volunteers, especially Stacy Dry Lara, for her tireless coordination.

Special Acknowledgments

- Kwame Nkrumah University from Central Province was recognized.

- Professor Peter Chumba Manchi was thanked for sponsoring Sister Maureen Casapulla.
- Professor Danyon Glovo was acknowledged for sponsoring Kabamba Kuma.
- Zambia Research and Development Centre (ZRDC) was introduced, with encouragement for delegates to connect and explore collaboration.
- Zambia University of Technology was also recognized

4. Confirmation of quorum from Credentials Committee

Catriona Sutherland confirmed that a quorum was present

GWI has 39 Fully Paid NFAs and 79 representative votes

A GWI quorum requires:

- 1/3 of NFAs: therefore 13 NFAs required
- 1/3 votes representing NFAs: therefore 27 votes required
- 2 members of the Board

In attendance:

- 18 NFAs
- 45 Votes represented
- 3 Board members

A quorum was present for the General Assembly

5. Adoption of Agenda

The Agenda was adopted without objection

6. Adoption of Rules of Procedure

The Rules of Procedure were adopted without objection

7. Minutes of 34th Conference

The Minutes of the 34th Conference were adopted by the General Assembly in 2023.

8. Welcoming new Affiliates

Benin was welcomed as a new GWI Affiliate

9. Introduction of Candidates for GWI Board of Officers:

- **President Candidate**

Patricia PATTON Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW)

- **Vice President Advocacy Candidates**

Shaïla MISTRY Women Graduates-USA (WG-USA)

Gisèle SCANLON Irish Federation of University Women (IFUW)

- **Vice President Education Candidate**
Shirley GILLET Graduate Women New Zealand (GWNZ)
- **Vice President Fundraising Candidate**
Lynne KENT Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW)
- **Vice President Legal & Governance Candidate**
Joy HURST Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW)
- **Vice President Marketing Candidate**
Nataly GARCIA ALVARADO Asociación de Mujeres Universitarias de El Salvador (AMUS)
- **Vice President Membership Candidates**
Meera BONDRE Indian Federation of University Women (IFUWA)
Glenda HECKSHER Women Graduates-USA (WG-USA)
- **Vice President Projects Candidates**
Ujwala SHINDE Indian Federation of University Women (IFUWA)
- **Treasurer**
Saskia VOORTMAN Graduate Women International Netherlands (GWI-NL)
- **Assistant Treasurer Canada**
Susan LANE Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW)
- **Assistant Treasurer Switzerland**
Elisabeth GRIMM Swiss Association of University Women (SVA/ASFUDU)

Candidate Presentations for Board Positions

President candidate: Patricia Patton

Pat shared that there are three areas of focus that she believes GWI needs to address for its continued success and growth: Members, Finances and the Future. She said that it is her vision for GWI that the members of GWI will stand together in strength in support of GWI's work and for the women in our countries. The leadership of GWI must understand the needs of NFAs, their hopes for their NFA and the education of women in each of their countries, and the issues women face in achieving their goals. Equally important is the financial stability of GWI; its financial resources in the Triennium 2026-2028 and to secure its financial future.

National Federations and Associations are the strength of GWI, and its mission is achieved through the vision of the NFAs for the women in their countries. A series of meetings will be held with the NFAs in their regions to bring about mutual understanding and collaboration between members. Independent Members have identified areas for advocacy

that are important to them and the good work of the Young Members Network has brought the issues and challenges that young women face in their education and careers to the forefront. She stressed that we must support the next generation of women leaders in all that GWI does.

GWI's finances are in a precarious position. Bringing GWI's finances under control has been done through significant sacrifice and she stressed the importance of stabilizing GWI's finances in the next Triennium as a priority for the leadership team together with members.

The future of GWI depends on its financial stability, the support of its membership and recognition of its ability to advocate to improve the lives of women and girls through education and leadership.

She concluded by saying that the number of GWI staff needs to be increased in order that GWI can do all that its mission promises and committed to find ways to address this difficult situation and put in place plans to enhance GWI's work.

Treasurer candidate: Saskia Voortman

Saskia noted her many years of membership in GWI and stressed that she would build on the foundation that has already been put in place. She will work to enhance GWI's visibility, internally and externally, and to develop connection to and among NFAs. More concrete information will be available to NFAs together with cooperation with other women's organizations. GWI's financial stability will be her priority during the next Triennium.

Candidate for Vice President Education: Shirley Gillett

Shirley shared her reflections on past contributions, including her work in Sierra Leone where she helped build a classroom. Looking ahead, she expressed her desire to support the President and the Board, emphasizing the importance of teamwork and collaboration. She voiced her commitment to continuing the "Renew and Rebuild" process and advocated for greater inclusion of persons with disabilities and those on the margins of society.

She proposed developing collaborative projects with UNESCO and UNICEF, and integrating board roles more closely with education, fundraising, and advocacy initiatives.

Candidate for Vice President Advocacy: Gisèle Scanlon (Ireland)

Gisèle greeted the Assembly warmly and thanked members for their support during Ireland's centenary celebrations. She shared her extensive background in community-based advocacy, including her work with marginalized girls in Dublin who had married young and were returning to education. Her experience spans 27 years across multiple countries, including a vaccine program she led in Congo in her twenties.

Gisèle emphasized the importance of building advocacy toolkits for NFAs and empowering girls to find and use their own voices. She shared a powerful story of a girl who, through a public speaking competition, found the confidence to pursue law and is now a qualified lawyer.

She stressed that advocacy is not about speaking for others, it's about finding them and helping them speak for themselves.

She also pledged to support fundraising efforts across GWI.

Candidate for Vice President Fundraising: Lynn Kent (Canada)

Lynn expressed her enthusiasm for the opportunity to serve, acknowledging the critical role of fundraising in stabilizing and growing GWI. She described the organization as a collective of NFAs, where the strength of each contributes to the vitality of the whole.

She emphasized the importance of this triennium as a tipping point for GWI to approach with passion and hard work and together, GWI will tip GWI upward for the benefit of every single member.

She pledged to build a strong fundraising committee, engage members, and ensure the financial resources needed to empower women globally.

Candidate for Vice President Legal and Governance: Joy Hurst

Joy began by honouring GWI's 106-year legacy and emphasized the untapped potential of its global network. She offered a fresh perspective on governance, describing it not as a burden but as a liberating force which provides the structures and processes that make an organization fit for purpose. It transforms aspirational goals into achievable outcomes.

Joy affirmed her commitment to GWI's long-term sustainability and shared her belief that the organization is poised for transformative impact. Her remarks reflected both strategic insight and deep dedication to the mission.

Joy noted the presence of a full delegation from the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW), including herself as Immediate Past President and two other past presidents, as a testament to CFUW's enduring support for GWI.

10. Introduction of candidates for GWI Standing Committees

Delegates attention was drawn to the list of candidates for the Standing Committees and, as speeches would not be made during the meeting, were asked to read the bios of all candidates provided in the GA Booklet.

Education Committee Candidates

(1 Convenor, 4 Members - to be elected by the members)

Convenor

Annie MUSONDA Graduate Women Zambia (GWZ)

Members

Genevieve ADUKPO Ghana Association of University Women (GAUW)

Kei FORAN Japanese Association of University Women (JAUW)

Anne HEADLEY Irish Federation of University Women (IFUW)

Nesrin KOC Turkish Association of University Women (TAUW)

Gail NEFF Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW)

Finance Committee Candidates

(1 Convenor and 3 committee members- to be elected by the members)

Convenor

Vacant

Member

Aylin SATGELDI Turkish Association of University Women (TAUW)

Governance Committee Candidates

(1 Convenor, 4 Members- to be elected by the members)

Convenor

Vacant

Members

Aylin MORALIUGLU Turkish Association of University Women (TAUW)

Jagdale NEELAM Indian Federation of University Women (IFUWA)

Membership Committee Candidates

(1 Convenor, 4 Members - to be elected by the members)

Convenor

Eloisa SANCHEZ-AMILLATEGUI Spanish Federation of University Women (SFUW)

Members

Ranjana BANERJEE Indian Federation of University Women (IFUWA)

Başak KALKAN-ADAR Turkish Association of University Women (TAUW)

Marite MEHR Spanish Federation of University Women (SFUW)

Margaret MWALE Graduate Women Zambia (GWZ)

Patricia REAVY Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW)

Projects Development Committee Candidates

(1 Convenor, 4 Members - to be elected by the members)

Convenor

Laura ACOSTA TORRES Federacion Mexicana de Universitarias (FEMU)

Aisha ALSHAWAF British Federation of Women Graduates (BFWG)

Members

Eunice IMASIKU Graduate Women Zambia (GWZ)

Malati KALMADI Indian Federation of University Women (IFUWA)

Yesim SARISU Turkish Association of University Women (TAUW)

Award of International Fellowships Committee Candidates

(1 Convenor and 2-6 committee members – to be appointed by the Board)

Convenor

Başak OVACIK Turkish Association of University Women (TAUW)

Members

Kalyani BONDRE Indian Federation of University Women (IFUWA)

Joanna KATIFORIS Graduate Women New Zealand (GWNZ)

Marite MEHR Spanish Federation of University Women (SFUW)

Anne SIKWIBELE Graduate Women Zambia (GWZ)

Hegg Hoffet Committee Candidates

(1 Convenor and 2-6 committee members – to be appointed by the Baard)

Convenor

Cynthia ADINORTEY Ghana Association of University Women (GAUW)

Members

Brenda ROBERTSON Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW)

Selin SOLU Turkish Association of University Women (TAUW)

Resolutions Committee Candidates

(1 Convenor 2-4 committee members – to be appointed by the Board)

Convenor

Beryl MATTHEWSON Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW)

Members

Aylin LEWIS Turkish Association of University Women (TAUW)

Menna SAYED MOHAMED Graduate Women New Zealand (GWNZ)

Leonie VAN DEN TOL Graduate Women International Netherlands (GWI-NL)

11. Emergency Resolutions

There were no emergency resolutions.

BUSINESS SESSION 2**12. Overview of GWI financial situation:****a) Report of the Treasurer: Triennial review 2023-2025**

Treasurer Karoline Dorsch gave a comprehensive update on GWI's financial position, leadership transitions, and recent developments in donor contributions.

It was acknowledged that the past year presented challenges, particularly in membership engagement and financial forecasting. Despite these hurdles, GWI celebrated its 105th anniversary, marking over a century of commitment to women's education and empowerment.

A notable achievement was GWI's recognition by Acquisition International as the Most Empowering Nonprofit Organization a testament to its global impact and resilience. While international recognition brings visibility, it also carries risk and responsibility.

The Treasurer's report highlighted fluctuations in the General Reserve Fund, noting a downturn since 2019 followed by stabilization in the past year. Financial oversight remained a priority, with ongoing reviews of reports and voting rights procedures. The presence of experienced members, especially those with deep institutional knowledge, was described as invaluable.

One such transition was acknowledged with gratitude: a former board member stepped down due to personal reasons, including the demands of parenting. Her contributions were praised, and her departure was met with understanding and appreciation.

Executive Director Stacy Dry Lara reported that the Kathryn Horvat legacy funds were released from Horvat's Individual Retirement Account the day before the Assembly and were moving through the final steps for transfer to GWI. Approximately USD 110,000 should be received, reflecting the full percentage allocation designated to GWI; the final amount remains subject to minor market-related adjustment at the time of actual money transfer.

b) Report of Finance Committee and Assistant Treasurer

The Assembly was directed to the report of the Finance Committee and Assistant Treasurer in the GA Booklet. There were no questions regarding the report.

Appointment of the Auditor

Moved by: Treasurer Karoline Dorsch

Seconded by: Scotland

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves that:

- **The members approve the auditors PKF Fiduciaire SA for the Triennium 2026-2028**

MOTION CARRIED

To close the session, the Assembly welcomed the **Banthu Diwo Cultural Dance Team**, who performed a vibrant and joyful routine to help assimilate the rich information shared throughout the day.

Keynote Address: Beatrice Kapindula-Simpasa

Beatrice Kapindula-Simpasa a gender and development specialist, with advanced training in mental health and international experience across Africa and the United States, shared a powerful testimony on the often-overlooked emotional and psychological burdens carried by men. (See summary of speech in Addendum).

BUSINESS SESSION 3

13. Report on Strategic Plan 2023-2025

The Assembly was informed that GWI's growth would depend on its ability to:

- Anticipate and prevent challenges through proactive planning

- Expand staff capacity to meet increasing demands
- Deliver on past commitments and new initiatives
- Strengthen regional engagement and cross-border collaboration

Delegates were reminded that advocacy and project success require not only vision but resources. The pandemic had exposed limitations but also revealed opportunities for innovation and resilience.

President Patrice concluded with a call to action that GWI be known not only for our ideals, but also for our impact as the organization that turns knowledge into leadership, and leadership into change.

14. Report of Board of Officers

President

President Patrice delivered a compelling address reflecting on the previous Triennium for Graduate Women International (GWI).

She affirmed that GWI must continue to stand together in strength and support, recognizing the diverse needs, hopes, and educational priorities of its National Federations and Associations (NFAs). The leadership must remain attuned to the realities facing women in each country, including barriers to education, economic empowerment, and social justice.

President Patrice reported that GWI had stabilized its financial resources and laid the groundwork for a secure future. She acknowledged the sacrifices made by members and the importance of continued stewardship to ensure sustainability.

She praised the work of all members and thanked the Board of Officers who served during the Triennium 2022-2025.

VP Education-Shirley Gillett

Shirley reported on the strategic engagement with education policy over the past triennium. Highlights included:

- Presentation of the roadmap for education in the virtual GWI Townhall on 13 September 2023
- Advocacy for inclusive education and political participation
- Education-oriented parallel events for CSW, the first virtual (2024), the second in person (2025).
- Encouragement of the Education Committee to present a workshop at Lusaka, Zambia, on “Child Brides and Education”.
- Organization of the Triennial Conference in Zambia and supporting the GWZ LAC.
- Revitalizing the online members' Discussion Network with a discussion for “World Teachers Day around the question “What did teachers mean to you?,” and participation in the members' discussion on Artificial Intelligence.

- Launching the Heritage Wall fundraising for GWI's 105th Anniversary

The Education Committee emphasized its role in supporting adult literacy, prioritizing communications, and organizing diplomatic programs. Two current members expressed interest in continuing their service for another term.

The committee also noted the importance of integrating education with broader social and cultural frameworks, and reaffirmed its commitment to supporting teachers, learners, and policy makers across member countries.

The members of the Education Committee were thanked for their diligent service and generous contribution to GWI over the Triennium.

The Assembly's attention was drawn to the remaining Board of Officers reports that were included in the GA Booklet.

15. Report of the Executive Director

Executive Director, Stacy Dry Lara, reported on key achievements of the 2023–2025 Triennium, highlighting the collective contributions of the Board, National Federations and Associations (NFAs), Committees, Independent Members, and the Geneva office, supported by 14 international interns. She underscored the strategic value of GWI's Geneva headquarters, including access to UN Permanent Missions and the credibility associated with Switzerland, which benefits NFAs in their national work.

During the Triennium, GWI maintained active engagement across all UN Human Rights Council sessions in Geneva, annual Commission on the Status of Women sessions in New York, and collaborative work with UNESCO and UNITAR, while continuing leadership of the NGO Committee on Human Rights, Geneva. Efforts to broaden partnerships included participation in the World Economic Forum in Davos, expanding visibility among new audiences and potential partners.

The Executive Director reported strong advocacy and communications output, including regular newsletters, social media outreach, infographics, and press engagement, and encouraged greater NFA use of these tools. Program updates included continued success of Teachers for Rural Futures in Uganda, the resumption of Bina Roy Partners in Development projects across multiple regions, and ongoing support to refugee women through the Hegg Hoffet Fund.

She further reported the successful securing of a legacy donation from the late Kathryn Horvat, with approximately USD 110,000 designated to GWI, ensuring a deficit-free start to the new Triennium. The report concluded with recognition of NFA achievements, including participation in the Swiss Pavilion Expo in Osaka, and a call for increased member engagement.

Keynote Address: Chairperson of the NGO Coordinating Council (NGOCC)

The Assembly welcomed the keynote speaker, Ms. Beauty Katebe, the Chairperson of Zambia's NGO Coordinating Council (NGOCC), a dynamic leader known for her advocacy against gender-based violence and her tireless work for women's rights and equality. (See summary of speech in Addendum).

DAY TWO: 12 SEPTEMBER 2025

Day 2 of the General Assembly opened with two Keynote addresses and a Q&A session.

Keynote Address: Venus Hampinde, Chief Financial Officer, ABSA Bank

Speaker Venus Hampinde, Chief Financial Officer of the Zambia ABSA Bank, opened by acknowledging the theme of the Assembly **Culture, Education, and Empowerment**, and emphasized that these pillars must be supported by sustainable finance to be truly transformative. She spoke about the strides being made in women's economic leadership and building systems that work for women so that they are not left at the margins. (See summary of speech in Addendum).

Keynote Address: Dr. Mutinta Mabbolobolo, Director of Research and Dean School of Education, Information and Communications University

Gender Equity in Education, Leadership, and Governance

The Assembly welcomed Dr. Mutinta Mabbolobolo Director of Research and Dean of Education, Information and Communication University, who is also a former Commissioner of the Teaching Service Commission. She spoke passionately on the theme of culture, education, and empowerment, with a focus on gender equity in leadership and governance. (See summary of speech in Addendum).

16. Report of National Federations and Associations

The Assembly's attention was drawn to the extensive NFA reports published in the GA Booklet on the GWI website.

17. Report of Nominations Committee

The Nominations Committee Report in the GA Booklet was noted and the nominations of all candidates as described earlier in the meeting.

18. Report of the Membership Committee

The Membership Committee report was acknowledged as submitted and available in the General Assembly Book.

Sahar Gamal, Convener of the Independent Member Network (IMN), delivered a brief report:

- The IMN is 14 months old and launched its first initiative: the Raising Awareness Campaign titled *Challenges to Women's Empowerment: Causes and Remedies*.
- Seven members from seven countries participated in a four-month webinar series using a standardized GWI template.
- Topics ranged from student challenges and health data fragmentation to nutrition, biochemistry, and music education for girls with disabilities.

Sahar concluded by inviting collaboration and future participation in IMN webinars.

19. Report of the Education Committee

The Education Committee report was acknowledged as submitted.

20. Report of the Committee for Award of International Fellowships

- 80 applications received, with six fellowships awarded
- Over 400 emails exchanged during the vetting process
- A rigorous, data-driven evaluation system was used to ensure fairness and transparency

Delegates were encouraged to review the full report for further details.

21. Report of the Special Committee of Project Development

Aisha Alshawaf, Convener of the Project Development Committee, shared highlights from the Triennium:

- Successfully launched the Dr. Mehta Seed Fund, including application development, candidate selection, and interviews
- Encouraged NFAs to apply and expand grassroots impact
- Successfully managed multiple Bina Roy Partners in Development projects

Her remarks emphasized the importance of showcasing GWI's work to members and communities.

22. Report of the Special Committee for the Hegg Hoffet Fund

Terry Oudraad, former GWI President, gave a brief update on the Hegg Hoffet Fund and the report in the GA Booklet and the fundraising during the General Assembly of items provided by NFA attendees:

- The proceeds from merchandise sales only go to the Hegg Hoffet Fund.
- Delegates were encouraged to continue supporting fundraising efforts

23. Report of the Resolutions Committee

Cat Sutherland, the Resolutions Committee Convenor, reflected on her tenure since 2019, emphasizing the importance of actionable and measurable resolutions noting that the Resolutions Committee does not exist to carry out the resolutions, it is the responsibility of the NFAs, seconders, and implementation teams.

She noted that while 10 resolutions were passed in 2022, many were not fully acted upon. She urged NFAs to move beyond aspirational statements and commit to clear, achievable targets moving from intention to implementation taking real, tangible steps.

She thanked her colleagues, Beryl Matthewson, Laura Rojo MacLeod, Neelam Jagdale, Louise McLeod, Board Liaison, Shaila Rao Mistry, and Executive Director Stacy Dry Lara,

for their support and collaboration. She concluded by encouraging continued engagement with the resolutions process and announced her departure from the role.

24. Reports of GWI United Nations Representatives

The Assembly received updates from GWI's United Nations representatives in New York, Geneva, and Vienna.

New York

A detailed report compiled by **Maureen Byrne** and **Maryella Hannum** outlined GWI's engagement with:

- The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)
- UNICEF
- The High-Level Political Forum
- The SDG Summit

Delegates were encouraged to read the full report and consider how this work could inform and support their own NFA advocacy.

Geneva

Executive Director Stacy Dry Lara, also serving as a UN Representative in Geneva, highlighted:

- GWI's long-standing special partnership with UNESCO, one of only ~420 NGOs with this status
- Active participation in the Human Rights Council, CEDAW, Universal Periodic Review, and other Geneva-based mechanisms
- The importance of using GWI's own resolutions and materials in UN statements

She encouraged NFAs to contribute data and stories to strengthen GWI's advocacy at the international level.

Vienna

Elisabeth Francis, GWI's UN Representative in Vienna, shared her work with the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and related agencies. Her advocacy focuses on transnational organized crime and its impact on women, including:

- Gender-based violence
- Human trafficking
- Corruption
- Cybercrime
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Child marriage
- Environmental crime

She noted that violence against women remains one of the most underreported crimes and among the least likely to lead to convictions.

She also engages with broader issues such as:

- Sustainable development
- Climate change
- Peacekeeping
- Artificial intelligence and its gendered consequences

Elisabeth participates in major UN conferences, including:

- The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
- The Commission on Narcotic Drugs
- The Conference of the Parties to the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
- The quinquennial Crime Congress (next in Abu Dhabi, April 2026)

She represents GWI in four UN NGO committees:

- Sustainable Development
- Status of Women
- Peace
- Beijing+25

25. Report of the Governance Committee

It was brought to the attention of the Assembly that the Governance Committee was not included in the presented committee reports but the committee report was included in the GA Booklet.

BUSINESS SESSION 4

26. Results of Election for President, VPs and Treasurer

President: Patricia Patton (Canadian Federation of University Women); 63 votes

Treasurer: Saskia Voortman (Graduate Women International Netherlands); 62 votes

VP Advocacy: Gisèle Scanlon (Irish Federation of University Women); 62 votes

VP Education: Shirley Gillett (Graduate Women New Zealand); 54 votes

VP Fundraising: Lynne Kent (Canadian Federation of University Women); 57 votes

VP Governance: Joy Hurst (Canadian Federation of University Women); 59 votes

VP Marketing: Nataly Garcia Alvarado (Asociacion de Mujeres Universitarias de El Salvador); 53 votes

VP Membership: Meera Bondre (Indian Federation of University Women's Associations); 41 votes

VP Projects: Ujwala Shinde (Indian Federation of University Women's Associations) 57 votes

Clarifications were provided information regarding the voting process:

- A weighted voting system is used based NFA number of members
- Online e-ballots were securely processed by an independent company

Delegates requested more detailed breakdowns of voting participation in future sessions, which GWI committed to do.

27. Presentation of proposed budget for 2026-2028

Internal Resolution 2: Approval of Triennial Planning

Karoline Dorsch presented the proposed budget for the 2026–2028 Triennium, emphasizing the complexity of planning with a new leadership team and evolving circumstances.

Key points included:

- Approval of the triennial budget as a flexible framework, not a fixed annual allocation
- Funds may be carried forward across years based on needs and Board discretion
- Salaries and personnel costs reflect Swiss legal requirements, including social and health security contributions
- Geneva office operations remain modest but essential
- Audit costs and administrative expenses were outlined, including CHF 1,800 for external audit services

Karoline stressed the importance of conservative financial planning while remaining responsive to member needs and global developments.

Motion to approve the proposed budget 2026-2028

Moved by: Scotland

Seconded by: Ireland

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves to:

- **approve the triennial financial planning 2026-2028**
- **approve the estimates as a triennial budget and not as discrete annual budgets, so that money not spent in one year can be carried forward to the next**
- **approve that the 2026-2028 Board can adjust the annual planning according to need and circumstances provided that the Board abides by all constitutional requirements.**

MOTION CARRIED

28. Discussion and voting on Internal Resolutions

Internal Resolution 1: Approval of audited accounts for 2022-2024

Moved by: The Board of Officers on recommendation of the Finance Committee

Seconded by: Netherlands

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves that:

The members approve the audited accounts for 2022, 2023, 2024 presented by the auditors PKF Fiduciaire SA

It was pointed out that the 2022 audited statement should be included, as they were not approved at the Triennial in 2022, but were not in the GA Booklet. After discussion it was acknowledged that the 2022 audited statements were posted to the GWI website in 2023 and have been available to all members since that time, a choice was proposed that either the two years 2023 and 2024 could be voted during this meeting and 2022 be voted at a later date by electronic voting or all three be voted on today. Due to the availability of 2022 since posted in 2023, it was agreed that 2022 would be included in the motion.

MOTION CARRIED.

Clarification on Internal Resolutions and Voting Procedure

During the discussion of internal resolutions, a procedural clarification was made:

- Internal resolutions originating from the Board do not require a motion from the floor.
- The motion is considered made by the Board; only a seconder is required.

Internal Resolution 3

Approval of the Rate of Annual Dues payable to GWI by the National Federations and Associations

The Assembly reviewed the annual assessment of membership dues based on GDP per capita (PPP) using the latest available data from the World Bank. Key points included:

- All country values had increased, but not significantly enough to warrant a change in dues groupings.
- Therefore, membership dues remain unchanged for the upcoming triennium.
- Conditions for requesting dues alleviation also remain unchanged.

Proposed by the GWI Board of Officers on the recommendation of the GWI Finance Committee

Seconded by: Great Britain

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves to:

- **Keep the same annual dues rate in the 2026-2028 Triennial as in the preceding Triennial.**

MOTION CARRIED

Internal Resolution 4

Approval of a Change in Financial Reporting

Proposed by the GWI Board of Officers on the recommendation of the GWI Finance Committee

The motion was seconded.

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves that:

- **Financial reporting has to occur twice yearly**

- **The functional revenue and expenditure statement for financial reporting as well as for financial planning can be omitted as long as GWI has at the most three employees.**

Karoline presented a proposal to streamline financial reporting in line with Swiss law and GWI's operational scale.

Key points:

- GWI has fewer than three employees and assets well below the CHF 10 million threshold.
- Under Swiss law, this exempts the organization from requiring a limited statutory audit.
- A Review Committee may conduct the annual financial review instead.
- This change would result in annual savings of approximately CHF 3,675.
- Functional revenue and expenditure statements may be omitted, reducing bookkeeping costs.

MOTION CARRIED

Internal resolution 5

Approval of a change in audit type

Proposed by the GWI Board of Officers on the recommendation of the GWI Finance Committee

The motion was seconded.

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves to:

- **Approve a yearly financial review in compliance with Swiss law instead of a limited statutory audit.**

The Assembly engaged in a robust discussion regarding Internal Resolution 5, which proposed transitioning from a limited statutory audit to an internal financial review conducted by a Review Committee.

Karoline reiterated the rationale:

- The proposed system aligns with Swiss legal thresholds for organizations with fewer than 50 employees and under CHF 10 million in assets.
- The current audit process costs approximately CHF 3,600 annually, which could be redirected to programmatic work.
- The internal review model, commonly used by Swiss associations, has proven effective and reliable in her experience.

She emphasized that the bookkeeping is solid. The review process has worked well in other organizations and we believe this is a sound and cost-effective approach.

Several delegates expressed concern about the timing and implications of the proposed change:

- A delegate noted that the internal resolutions were received only hours before the AGM began, leaving little time for review or discussion.

- There was concern that the new process would eliminate external scrutiny and shift appointment power solely to the Board.

Karoline clarified that the proposed Review Committee would include:

- A former GWI Treasurer
- An Assistant Treasurer who is the Finance Committee Convenor
- A member of a NFA

While not an external audit, the committee would include individuals with financial expertise and institutional knowledge.

A delegate emphasized the importance of maintaining international credibility:

Another delegate remembered why external audits were introduced in the first place. It was about restoring trust, and it may be too soon to step away from that commitment.

A suggestion was raised to explore a hybrid model, retaining some form of external scrutiny while reducing costs. However, it was noted that such a proposal would require further discussion and could not be voted on immediately.

Karoline responded that bringing in an external reviewer would require paying fees and would negate the savings.

Karoline reiterated that the proposed review model is not exclusive to small clubs but is widely used by international organizations based in Switzerland. She emphasized:

- The review process is legally compliant under Swiss law
- The cost savings of CHF 3,675 annually are significant for GWI's modest budget
- The internal review committee would include experienced financial officers and one NFA member

Delegates from Canada, New Zealand, and other NFAs voiced concerns:

- The timing of the resolution's release (just days before the AGM) left little room for review and internal consultation
- The absence of external scrutiny may undermine GWI's credibility when applying for grants or sponsorships
- The perception of self-auditing could deter potential donors and partners

MOTION FAILED

Following the vote GWI agreed to revisit this at a later date and should it come before the Assembly again would provide ample time for NFAs to review and discuss. NFAs' concerns were acknowledged and were thanked for their thoughtful discussion.

At this point the Treasurer suggested that Internal Resolution 6 would not be needed however a member raised a point of order and noted that the motion must be put on the floor as it was included in the General Assembly notice of internal resolutions however, as they were proposed by the Board of Officers, they could be officially withdrawn.

Internal resolution 6

Approval of a financial audit by a review committee.

Proposed by the GWI Board of Officers on the recommendation of the GWI Finance Committee

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves to:

- **Approve that the annual Financial Report of GWI is reviewed by a committee of three members: a) the Finance Committee Convener, who represents one of the two Assistant Treasurers, b) a past Treasurer, c) a member of an NFA. With the exception of the Assistant Treasurer the members are all independent of the Board or any other committee.**

MOTION WITHDRAWN DUE TO THE FAILURE TO PASS OF INTERNAL RESOLUTION 5.

Internal Resolution 7

Appointment of Assistant Treasurers

Proposed by the GWI Board of Officers on the recommendation of the GWI Finance Committee

The motion was seconded.

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves to:

- **appoint Elisabeth Grimm, nominated by the Swiss Association of University Women, and Susan Lane, nominated by the Canadian Federation of University Women, to the positions of Assistant Treasurers on the Finance Committee for the triennium 2026-2028.**

MOTION CARRIED

29. Introduction of Policy Resolutions

The session opened with the introduction of the **Policy Resolutions**, a key component of the General Assembly's advocacy and strategic direction. Delegates were reminded that:

- The call for policy resolutions was issued in accordance with the official timeline once the Assembly dates were confirmed.
- All resolutions had been circulated in advance, including amendments following the formal amendment meeting.
- This session was for presentation and voting only, no debate would be held.

The convener clarified that only the titles and outlines of each resolution would be read aloud. Action plans and references were available in the GA booklet and had been accessible for several months.

30. Vote on Policy Resolutions

Resolution 1

Equitable Rights for Postgraduate Researchers

Proposed by Graduate Women Scotland (GWS)

Seconded by British Federation of Women Graduates (BFWG), Turkish Association of University Women (TAUW)

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves:

To seek adjustments to laws and institutional policies in order to ensure that postgraduate researchers receive the same rights as those who are employed by their institution, with a primary focus on parental leave and for international students, equitable visa regulations.²

MOTION CARRIED

Resolution 2

Advancing Gender Equity in Artificial Intelligence AI Development

Proposed by Women Graduates-USA

Seconded by the Indian Federation of Women Graduates (IFWG)

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves the following:

To influence the responsible development of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), to ensure its impact strengthens the protection of women's education, health, and economic security in the digital age, through women's leadership in the development of algorithms and inclusive, ethical, secure, and equitable systems.

MOTION CARRIED

Resolution 3

Taking Action Globally to End Stalking, Harassment and Cyber Bullying

Proposed by Graduate Women New Zealand

Seconded by: Australian Graduate Women, Indian Federation of University Women and Irish Federation of University Women

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves that:⁴

- NFAs urge their governments to recognise that all women and girls around the world should be able to live their lives confidently, free from stalking, harassment and bullying online and in the real world.
- NFAs advocate with their governments to make online and real-world stalking, harassment and bullying, offences in their countries and implement a legislative policy framework that will act as a deterrent and provide enhanced protection to victims.
- NFAs advocate that law enforcement in their countries receive more training to deal with online and real-world stalking, harassment and bullying.
- GWI's advocacy include a focus on eliminating online violence including stalking, harassment and bullying.

MOTION CARRIED

Resolution 4

Towards a Comprehensive Maternal Death Prevention Strategy

Proposed by Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW)

Seconded by Uganda Association University Women and Irish Federation of University Women

Note: This Resolution builds on the previous 1992 Resolution. The CFUW 2025 resolution proposal is to retain Resolve 1 and 2 from the GWI 1992 Resolution, revise Clause 3, and add a fourth Clause.

The changes reflect a recognition of the importance of collecting consistent data and using the data to inform decisions to improve the outcomes for women in childbirth, reflected in the CFUW 2023 resolution titled “Towards a Comprehensive Maternal Death Prevention Strategy.”

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves:

Revised Clause 3:

That NFAs urge their respective governments to develop and implement programs as part of safe motherhood initiatives, to collect and analyze consistent disaggregated and anonymized data about maternal deaths and close calls, and to share those data in confidential form with relevant groups (e.g. health care providers, policymakers, researchers, advocacy groups, members of the public).

Clause 4:

That NFAs urge their respective governments to work on a comprehensive maternal death prevention strategy. This strategy would promote awareness and best practices among healthcare providers around risk factors (e.g. age, child and early marriage, ethnicity, race, low income, mental health issues, housing, education level, access to medical care) and enhance public education of patient populations.

MOTION CARRIED

Resolution 5

Advancing Sustainable Development and Gender Equality through International Trade Agreements

Proposed by: CFUW Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW)

Seconded by Women Graduates-USA

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves that:

1. National Federations and Associations (NFAs) urge their respective governments use international trade agreements and related policies are used as tools to maximize efforts to promote and thereby to reaffirm and accelerate the achievement of the 2015 United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. National Federations and Associations (NFAs) urge their respective governments to affirm commitments/commit to gender equality by consulting with civil society organizations in developing, monitoring and evaluating the gendered impacts of their respective international trade agreements.

MOTION CARRIED

Resolution 6

Restore, Preserve and Protect Global Peatlands

Proposed by: CFUW (Canadian Federation of University Women)

Seconded by: Graduate Women Scotland (GWS) and Paraguay Federation Graduate Women and Nigeria Association of Graduate Women

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves that:

1. National Federations and Associations (NFAs) urge their respective governments to:

- a. implement legislation/policies to protect and restore degraded peatlands and take immediate concrete steps to prevent further destruction of all peatlands
- b. adhere to the principles of the Ramsar Convention Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands (2002) to halt the worldwide loss of wetlands and to conserve, through wise use and management, those that remain
- c. designate funding for research to urgently identify all peatlands in their countries and study how peatlands benefit our earth and its inhabitants

2. National Federations and Associations urge their respective governments and educational institutions to:

- a. educate the public and protect peatlands in order to:
- b. recognize that these ecosystems are ancient and irreplaceable
- c. mitigate climate change
- d. improve food and water security
- e. reduce forest fire severity
- f. enhance coastal management
- g. decrease ecological concerns regarding peatlands' flora and fauna.

3. National Federations and Associations urge their respective governments and educational institutions to engage with industries such as, but not limited to, mining, forestry, road construction and urbanization to prevent direct or indirect damage to peatlands.

MOTION CARRIED

Resolution 7

Preserving Deep Sea Ecosystems

Proposed by: Canadian Federation of University Women CFUW

Seconded by: Australian Graduate Women and Graduate Women New Zealand

The 35th General Assembly resolves that:

National Federations and Associations (NFAs) urge their respective governments at all levels to:

- a. Protect deep sea ecosystems in global coastal waters by declaring and/or extending a moratorium on seabed mining until research has been completed and a robust regulatory regime has been developed and implemented
- b. fund and support credible short and long-term scientific research on deep sea ecosystems and how to regulate and preserve their biodiversity
- c. work with other member countries, and in alignment with SDG 14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development) and the UN Decade of Ocean Science for sustainable Development to urgently press the International Seabed Authority to declare a precautionary pause on international deep seabed mining activities until comprehensive, science-

based and enforceable seabed mining regulations are developed and implemented to protect deep sea ecosystems.

MOTION CARRIED

Resolution 8

International and Domestic Legislation to Prevent Further Destruction of the Natural Environment by Deliberate or Negligent Human Action

Proposed by: Women Graduates-USA, FEMU Federación Española de Mujeres Universitarias, SPAIN

Seconded by: Indian Federation of University Women and Canadian Federation of University Women

The 35th GWI General Assembly resolves:

To educate ourselves and others about the climate crisis and about evidence-based measures to remedy it.

To urge both international and domestic governments to pass laws and enact measures to prevent the destruction of the natural environment by deliberate or negligent human action.

MOTION CARRIED

31. Introduction of Constitutional Amendments

Delegates were reminded that:

- The amendments were submitted by the Governance Committee and the Canadian Federation of University Women
- Full texts had been circulated in advance and discussed with NFAs at a meeting in advance of the GA and amendments agreed at that time
- Amendments clarified committee structures, meeting procedures, and governance processes

32. Discussion and Vote on Constitutional Amendments

Constitutional Amendment 1

Proposed Constitutional Amendment 1

Proposed by VP Governance

Seconded by: Canadian Federation of University Women

Addition of a new Article VII Clause 3 and subsequent renumbering of the clauses which follow (current Clause 3 becomes Clause 4) and reformatting of Finance Committee details .

3. There shall be three Executive Committees - the Finance Committee, the Governance Committee and the Nominations Committee.

4. There shall be a Finance Committee.

7. There shall be the following standing committees elected at the triennial General

Assembly from a slate of nominees recommended by the Nominations Committee. Their terms of reference shall be established by the Board of Officers in consultation with the respective committees:

- Education Committee
- Membership Committee
- Projects Development Committee
- Hegg Hoffet Fund
- Policy Resolutions Committee
- Fellowships Committee

MOTION CARRIED

Constitutional Amendment 2

Proposed Constitutional Amendment 2

Proposed by the Canadian Federation of University Women

The motion was seconded.

Proposed addition of a new Article V. Clause: 3 (4) Meetings

GWI Annual Virtual Member Meeting

In the non-triennial General Assembly years, a virtual meeting may be held of GWI members to enhance dialogue and communication, providing a platform for but not limited to the following:

GWI headquarters and Board sharing of information on progress regarding strategic priorities and implementation strategies, NFA sharing of priorities, strategies, challenges and successes, networking within the membership, and new NFA members will be introduced together with updates and progress reports from associate academic institutions and or corporate members.

At minimum, 6-month notice of the Annual Virtual Membership Meeting, put forth by the GWI Board of Officers, will be given with due consideration of NFA time zones.

MOTION CARRIED

Constitutional Amendment 3

Proposed Constitutional Amendment 3

Proposed by the Canadian Federation of University Women

The motion was seconded.

Proposed revision of Article VII Clause 8 (1)

The purpose of the Nominations Committee shall be to scrutinise all nominations put forward for the Board of Officers and GWI **executive and** standing committees and make such recommendations to the General Assembly and the Board as will ensure that an appropriate and balanced slate of names, **including at least one young member for every Committee**, is provided for election or appointment.

MOTION CARRIED

Constitutional Amendment 4

Proposed Constitutional Amendment 4

Proposed by the Canadian Federation of University Women

The motion was seconded.

Proposed addition of a new Article VII Clause 14;

The composition of all Committees should include at least one young member defined as up to the age of 40 years. Following the General Assembly, the GWI Board of Officers shall appoint an eligible young member to any Committee as necessary.

MOTION CARRIED

Constitutional Amendment 5

Proposed by the Canadian Federation of University Women

Seconded by: Graduate Women Scotland

Proposed revision of Article VII, Clause 9

Addition of two committees and addition of Advocacy to the Resolutions Committee:

- Resolutions and Advocacy Committee
- Fundraising Committee
- Marketing Committee

There shall be the following standing committees elected at the Triennial General Assembly from a slate of nominees recommended by the Nominations Committee. Their terms of reference shall be established by the Board of Officers in consultation with the respective committees:

- Education Committee
- Membership Committee
- Projects Development Committee
- **Resolutions and Advocacy Committee**
- **Fundraising Committee**
- **Marketing Committee**

After discussion it was proposed that the section on the proposed Resolutions and Advocacy Committee be separated from the motion.

Moved by: Canadian Federation of University Women

Seconded by: Graduate Women Scotland

That the section on the Resolutions and Advocacy Committee be separated from the main motion and be voted separately from the motion on the Fundraising and Marketing Committees.

MOTION CARRIED

Vote on revised main motion:

Moved by: Canadian Federation of University Women

Seconded by: British Federation of Graduate Women

There shall be the following standing committees elected at the Triennial General Assembly from a slate of nominees recommended by the Nominations Committee. Their terms of reference shall be established by the Board of Officers in consultation with the respective committees:

- Education Committee
- Membership Committee
- Projects Development Committee
- **Fundraising Committee**
- **Marketing Committee**

MOTION CARRIED

Following this motion the vote on the Resolutions and Advocacy Committee was not held as the meeting moved to the Opening of the new Triennium and presentation of the new Board and Committee members and closure of the General Assembly.

33. Results of elections and appointments for GWI Committees

The Chair announced that all candidates for election or appointment to GWI Committees were confirmed in the voting.

34. Opening of a new Triennium and presentation of the new Board and Committee members

President Patrice Wellesley-Cole acknowledged the diversity of views expressed during the assembly and thanked all delegates for their thoughtful contributions.

Pat Patton, the newly elected GWI President, officially opened the new Triennium and introduced the new Board and Committee members. The next Triennial General Assembly will be held in 2028, with the host country to be announced.

Following this, Patrice formally closed the 35th GWI General Assembly, bringing the session to a successful conclusion.

35. Closure of GWI General Assembly

36. Official opening of the 36th GWI Triennial

ADDENDUM: SUMMARY OF KEYNOTE SPEECHES

Keynote Address: Beatrice Kapindula-Simpasa

Beatrice Kapindula-Simpasa a gender and development specialist, with advanced training in mental health and international experience across Africa and the United States, shared a powerful testimony on the often-overlooked emotional and psychological burdens carried by men.

She began by acknowledging the conference theme, Building the Future: Integrating Culture, Education and Empowerment for Sustainability, and emphasized that meaningful development cannot be achieved without addressing the mental health of men. She stressed that to talk about good marriages, good governments, or good politicians must include men who are themselves are going through so much.

Drawing from her clinical practice, she described how unresolved childhood trauma, toxic environments, and dysfunctional family systems often manifest in adulthood as emotional instability, strained relationships, and leadership challenges.

She emphasized the importance of intergenerational healing and shared her approach:

- Engage clients individually, then bring in families
- Encourage men to seek therapy and open up
- Host informal talks and community engagements to reach those who may not seek formal help

Her closing message was a call to action to include socialization as the root to support for families.

Keynote Address: Chairperson of the NGO Coordinating Council (NGOCC)

The Assembly welcomed the keynote speaker, Ms. Beauty Katebe, the Chairperson of Zambia's NGO Coordinating Council (NGOCC), a dynamic leader known for her advocacy against gender-based violence and her tireless work for women's rights and equality.

She began by acknowledging the President of Graduate Women International, Ms. Patrice Wellesley-Cole, and respectfully observed protocol as previously established.

She noted that she is the Chairperson of NGOCC, an umbrella network of non-governmental, community-based, and faith-based organizations in Zambia that work to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

She candidly shared that when she first received the invitation from Madam Annie, she had not fully grasped the scale of the event: as a conference of great magnitude.

She extended her gratitude to the organizers and expressed her admiration for the energy, diversity, and commitment present in the room.

Ms. Katabe shared the historical connection between NGOCC and Graduate Women Zambia, noting that GWZ was one of the nine founding organizations that established NGOCC in 1985. Today, NGOCC has grown to encompass 117 member organizations across Zambia.

“In my language, we say ‘*Mayompap naine kaku papa*’, if you carry a child on your back, feed them, nurture them, they will one day do the same for you.”

She congratulated GWI on its 106-year legacy and GWZ on successfully hosting the 35th Triennial General Assembly, calling it a milestone achievement worthy of celebration.

She reflected on the Assembly’s theme, **Building the Future: Integrating Culture, Education, and Empowerment for Sustainability**, and its alignment with Zambia’s Vision 2030, the African Union’s Agenda 2063, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

She emphasized that a strong cultural identity, an equitable education system, and an empowered population are essential pillars for a sustainable future. These pillars are especially critical for women and girls, who remain among the most marginalized and vulnerable.

Addressing the subtheme, she turned to the urgent issue of gender-based violence (GBV), describing it as one of the greatest threats to women’s dignity, rights, and progress.

She called for consistent and timely studies to inform sustainable interventions and urged women in the room, especially those in academia and civil society, to lead this effort.

Ms. Katabe stressed that ending GBV cannot be the responsibility of women alone. She called for the deliberate engagement of:

- Men and boys
- Traditional leaders
- Policymakers
- Civil society
- Academia
- The private sector

Laws must be enforced. Survivors must be supported. Communities must be educated and the culture of silence and impunity must be dismantled. She called for women to transform ourselves, as individuals and as a collective, to build a future where no woman or girl lives in fear.

Ms. Katabe concluded with a call to transformation and collective responsibility to ensure that culture does not perpetuate human rights violations and leave the girl child more vulnerable. Empowerment must be truly meaningful to every woman and girl, whether in rural villages or urban centres.

She closed with a reflection on legacy and sustainability. Not every organization is 105 years old and to sustain for this length of time means the capability of achieving what is set out to do with strong foundations and systems backed by mindset change so that women, girls, men, and boys can thrive together.

Keynote Address: Venus Hampinde, Chief Financial Officer, ABSA Bank

Speaker Venus Hampinde, Chief Financial Officer of the Zambia ABSA Bank, opened by acknowledging the theme of the Assembly **Culture, Education, and Empowerment**, and emphasized that these pillars must be supported by sustainable finance to be truly

transformative. She spoke about the strides being made in women's economic leadership and building systems that work for women so that they are not left at the margins.

She highlighted the importance of intentional education not only in classrooms but through real-world opportunities, mentorship, and network-building.

Despite progress, she noted that many women remain unemployed or underemployed. Even when employed, they often lack authority and representation in leadership.

Women are 40% in organizations, but in leadership, it's still only 10–15%. Women are not taking the seats at the tables where decisions are made.

She spoke candidly about the additional burdens women carry, family responsibilities, societal expectations and the sacrifices they make to contribute meaningfully.

She shared that the global annual financing deficit for gender equality measures stands at USD 316 billion, a staggering figure that must be addressed to unlock Africa's full potential.

Encouragingly, she cited several frameworks and protocols already in place:

- African Women's Financial Inclusion Framework (2013)
- Agenda 2063
- Developmental Protocols for Gender Equality
- Continental Declarations with measurable targets

These strategies emphasize not just equality, but quality ensuring women receive the resources, skills, and opportunities to create lasting value. When fully implemented, these frameworks can transform structural barriers into stepping stones for an inclusive and sustainable Africa.

She introduced several institutional programs designed to support women entrepreneurs:

- Affordable financing and mentorship
- Advisory services and marketing platforms
- Retail partnerships for product distribution

She described the **Ready to Work** initiative, which includes a downloadable app that builds entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and digital readiness. This program teaches the basics how to show up, how to prepare, how to respond so that students and young professionals walk into the world with confidence and purpose.

She also mentioned internal programs that allow employees to showcase and sell their passion projects every Friday, preparing them for retirement and diversified income streams.

She emphasized that collaboration dismantles systemic barriers and builds inclusive economies. Women-owned enterprises already represent 35% of formal businesses in Zambia, yet challenges around funding and capital persist.

To address this, to build foundations her institution offers:

- Basic bookkeeping modules

- Payroll and recordkeeping support
- Training for financial presentation and compliance

She concluded with a call to action that without sustainable finance, culture, education, and empowerment cannot thrive. Women must have the skills, resources, and support to lead.

Keynote Address: Dr. Mutinta Mabbolobolo, Director of Research and Dean School of Education, Information and Communications University

Gender Equity in Education, Leadership, and Governance

The Assembly welcomed Dr. Mutinta Mabbolobolo Director of Research and Dean of Education, Information and Communication University, who is also a former Commissioner of the Teaching Service Commission. She spoke passionately on the theme of culture, education, and empowerment, with a focus on gender equity in leadership and governance.

She began by welcoming delegates from various countries and expressed her belief that all were enjoying Zambia's hospitality. She emphasized that Zambia is a welcoming country with friendly people and encouraged delegates to carry the warmth of their experience back to their home countries.

Drawing from her personal journey from teaching in boys' and girls' schools to serving in senior government roles, she affirmed that women are equal to the task of leading development.

She referenced her research on gender imbalance, noting that gender is not just biological but also social and psychological. The gender gap, she explained, refers to disparities between men and women across all aspects of life.

She reiterated that education is universally recognized as a cornerstone of social transformation, economic progress, and sustainable development. However, she noted that while women make up a significant proportion of the teaching workforce in Zambia and other African countries, their representation in senior decision-making roles remains low.

A 2021 report revealed that less than 30% of women occupy senior positions and that can be improved with women graduates such as in GWI.

She called attention to the rise of women activists, researchers, and educators, and emphasized the need for women to support one another and hold space for collective advancement.

She highlighted examples of women thriving in leadership within the Ministry of Education, including the current spokesperson and permanent secretary, both women. She affirmed that women are not only present but also excelling in policy-making roles such as leading research departments, serve as vice chancellors, and head institutions and research-led leadership.

She encouraged women to pursue internship opportunities and leadership roles in academia, emphasizing that women must be visible in shaping educational policy and institutional governance.

The speaker addressed the unique challenges women face in academia, particularly around motherhood, and emphasized the need to dismantle outdated norms and structures that hinder women's progress. She spoke candidly about the impact of pregnancy and caregiving

responsibilities on academic productivity, including reduced publication rates and citation visibility.

She noted that women often face penalties in research funding, promotion, and visibility due to caregiving roles, and called for more inclusive systems that recognize these realities. She asked attendees to challenge the structures that penalize women for being mothers and create academic environments that support not punish, women's full lives.

She called for policies that promote shared responsibility in caregiving, including workplace arrangements that support childcare and mental wellness. She stressed that women, too, get tired and deserve systems that recognize their dual roles.

The speaker addressed persistent stereotypes that confine women to domestic roles and limit their access to leadership. She challenged the notion that women belong only in the kitchen.

She highlighted the lack of mentorship and limited access to federal programs, noting that women often face male-dominated environments shaped by traditional norms. These cultures can create barriers to advancement and reinforce gendered expectations.

She called attention to the prevalence of sexual harassment in academic and professional settings, emphasizing that such environments discourage women from pursuing leadership roles and asked that systems be put in place to close the gap between men and women in higher education leadership.

She urged institutions to take an active role in retaining and promoting women, especially in STEM fields, where representation remains low.

She discussed the importance of encouraging women to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), noting that while girls are equally capable, fear and lack of support often deter them.

She called for curriculum reform and institutional support to prepare women for leadership roles and ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities.

She called on women to be each other's keepers, to lift one another up, and to build a culture of mentorship and solidarity.

She emphasized the importance of supporting women in balancing professional and personal responsibilities. She called for workplace policies that recognize the full spectrum of women's lives and enable them to thrive.

She urged the Assembly to address stereotypes and implement best practices that support women's full participation in society.

She concluded with a call to monitor progress toward constitutional commitments, including the 30% representation threshold for women in leadership.

Interactive Q&A Session

Following the keynote presentations, the Assembly transitioned to a Q&A. Delegates raised questions and shared reflections on institutional gender equity, diaspora inclusion, and the role of men in advancing women's empowerment.

A question was posed to the Director of Research regarding Zambia's progress on gender audits in higher education institutions, particularly in relation to pay equity and recruitment of female professors.

It was noted that Ireland has begun the Athena Swan Award auditing of universities for gender equality in employment and pay. Institutions that complete the audit receive increased government funding.

In Zambia, as a developing country implementing such measures is slowly being done. While pay equity is generally upheld, if a woman is a head teacher, she earns the same as a man, recruitment remains a challenge. Advocacy groups are pushing for more accountability.

She added that public universities apply quota systems to ensure a minimum percentage of female student admissions, while private universities tend to operate with more parity.

A member from the corporate sector noted that diversity and inclusion are embedded in performance metrics in her company with gender equity as part of the key performance indicators accounting for 10% of the scorecard. Female representation in leadership and equal pay for directors is tracked. This has helped men take ownership of the issue, it's no longer just a women's agenda.

Delegates inquired about the availability of empowerment tools and programs beyond Zambia. The speaker confirmed that the **Ready to Work** app is accessible globally, including in Canada, the US, UK, and China. She shared that she had personally traveled to the US to promote diaspora engagement and expand distribution networks.

Another delegate raised a critical point about the role of men in gender equity noting that men are needed to help us raise the boy child. At certain stages, boys need male figures to guide them. If men are not empowered, they cannot mentor effectively and urged that men be engaged in empowerment strategies so they understand women's language and walk together with women.

The panel affirmed the importance of inclusive empowerment, noting that systemic change requires the participation of all genders.

A delegate from the Sierra Leone Association of University Women shared reflections on navigating patriarchal structures where men sometimes feel threatened by women's progress yet women are making strides in the private sector. The government sector still has work to do.

She also celebrated her organization's upcoming 50th anniversary in February 2026, noting the importance of legacy and continued progress.

A university representative asked about the possibility of organizing a student-focused presentation on the **Ready to Work** app with confirmation from the speaker that this is possible as part of a roadshow that is done at universities. She emphasized that the app is accessible globally and allows students to learn at their own pace, with modules on entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and digital readiness.

A representative from the banking sector shared insights on engaging men and the realization that there were many programs for women, but none for men. A men's forum was launched and addressed dealing with mental health challenges, financial pressure, and identity struggles.

Another speaker shared her experience balancing motherhood and professional life where she was able to work two days in the office and three days from home during her maternity leave. She emphasized the importance of community support and workplace flexibility, noting that sacrifices are real but manageable with the right systems.

Minutes prepared and reviewed by Official Minute Scrutineers, Grace Hollett, Canadian Federation of University Women, and Terry Oudraad, Graduate Women Netherlands, and further reviewed thereafter by GWI President, Pat Patton, and Vice President Governance, Joy Hurst.

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