

# Z District 5 – Legislative Awareness & Advocacy

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## “ADVOCACY” ADDED TO ZI MISSION STATEMENT & OBJECTS

At the 58<sup>th</sup> Zonta International (ZI) Convention held in Melbourne, Australia this past June/July 2006, the Mission Statement of ZI was updated to the following:

Zonta International is a global organization of executives and professionals working together to advance the status of women worldwide through service and advocacy.

The Objects of ZI shall be:

- (a) To improve the legal, political, economic, educational, health, and professional status of women at the global and local level through service and advocacy.
- (b) To work for the advancement of understanding, goodwill, and peace through a world fellowship of executives in business and the professions.
- (c) To promote justice and universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- (d) To be united internationally to foster high ethical standards, to implement service programs, and to provide mutual support and fellowship for members who serve their communities, their nations, and the world.

The above underlined words are the new language that was adopted during Convention 2006. The rationale to the new language is two fold:

1. To emphasize that Zonta engages in both service and advocacy;
2. That Zonta will focus on both service and advocacy efforts on advancing the status of women.

So what does this new language mean to you and me as Zontians? How will advocacy affect our Club? I hope to give you some insight on how advocacy will fit within the scope of advancing the status of women along with our service projects and goals. In addition, I encourage you to bring any questions and/or comments that you

and/or your Club members may have on this issue to our upcoming District 5 Fall Governor’s Conference in Newark this month.

## ZONTA ADVOCACY: Definition – Policies – Protocol

ZI supports proposals and works to influence the laws and attitudes that impact women’s lives. According to the language adopted by the ZI Board on February 10, 2000, and then amended by the ZI Board on February 13, 2002, the definition of “advocacy” is the following:

*Advocacy is the expression of support for or opposition to a cause, argument or proposal. Advocacy may include influencing laws, legislation or attitudes.*

Along with ZI, Districts and Clubs are “urged” to express themselves about and become involved in issues which follow the Objects of ZI as stated earlier. To accomplish this, the ZI Board at its February 2000 meeting adopted several policies. I have highlighted just a few of them that pertain to legislative awareness and advocacy specifically:

1. ZI, its Districts and its Clubs shall be non-partisan and non-sectarian; thus, not advocating on behalf of or endorsing a political candidate or party or any religious denomination.
2. ZI, its Districts and its Clubs are encouraged to support legislation submitted to a legislative body for its consideration, which advances the implementation of the Objects of Zonta and the mandates of the Beijing Declaration from the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women.
3. ZI, its Districts and its Clubs may endorse qualified individuals for non-partisan positions.
4. Zonta Clubs may express their opinion on issues only as Clubs; Zonta districts may express their own opinions only as Districts; the Convention may express opinions on issues on behalf of ZI. Between conventions, only the

ZI Board may express opinions on issues on behalf of ZI. Individual members may express their personal views on issues only as private citizens, but may not attribute them to a Zonta Club, District or to ZI.

The above policies provide a protocol for Clubs, Districts and ZI to sign onto those issues that meet the Objects of ZI. *Only* a Club President may sign onto an issue on behalf of a Club *only* when a motion is passed by a majority of members at a Club meeting. Club Boards *may not* make policy, pass motions or take action binding a Club. Governors, Clubs and individuals should only advocate on matters pertaining to their own jurisdictions. In addition, Districts, Clubs and individuals should not sign petitions in Zonta's name. *Only* ZI's President/Board may sign onto issues on behalf of ZI. Finally, it is **imperative** that Zonta remain non-partisan and non-sectarian when advocating on any issues and/or when taking any action.

When Clubs and/or Districts do take a position on an issue, please make sure you send a copy of your letter/action to the Coordinator of the Legislative Awareness and Advocacy Committee. A link can be found on ZI's website for you to communicate with this International Committee.

## **LEGISLATIVE AWARENESS & ADVOCACY SUBCOMMITTEE**

This subcommittee is under the umbrella of the Status of Women Service Committee that has recommended action to improve the status of women, promote legislative awareness, advocacy and equal rights. Elba Pereyra de Gomensoro, a Zontian from the Club of Punta del Este-Maldonado, Uruguay, is the Coordinator of our ZI Legislative Awareness & Advocacy Subcommittee. Subcommittee Members also include:

- Mary Benoit, Zonta Club of Denver, CO, USA
- Stella Bentsi-Enchill, Zonta Club of Accra II, Ghana
- Jan Bowman, Zonta Club of Auckland Inc., New Zealand
- Chathuri Ranasinghe, Zonta Club of Colombo II, Sri Lanka
- Tora Wigstrand, Zonta Club of Jonkoping, Sweden

According to the ZI website, the Subcommittee's responsibilities include:

- Work with Zontians to combine service and advocacy efforts
- Learn how laws are made and by whom, how they are implemented and how to engage in the advocacy process
- Advocate on key status of women issues
- Effect changes to benefit women

## **CURRENT ZI LEGISLATIVE & ADVOCACY RESOLUTIONS**

Even though the word "advocacy" was just added to ZI's Mission and Objectives at Convention 2006, ZI has been actively advocating for women's issues for many years. Here is a listing of Resolutions ZI has adopted at past Conventions:

- Resolution on Female Genital mutilation (FGM) – ZI has worked tirelessly to eradicate female genital mutilation; Resolution adopted at 52<sup>nd</sup> ZI Convention, Detroit MI, USA – July 1994
- Resolution on Violence Against Women (VAW) – ZI has focused on recognizing women's rights for over 50 years worldwide and has encouraged Clubs to select the eradication of violence against women of all generations as a service focus; Resolution adopted at 54<sup>th</sup> ZI Convention, Paris, France – July 1998
- Resolution on Optional Protocol – The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979, is a comprehensive and legally binding treaty on women's human rights aiming to achieve equality between men and women in all fields of civil, political, social, economic and cultural life; ZI has been working for ratification of CEDAW by all countries; Resolution adopted at 55<sup>th</sup> ZI Convention, Honolulu, Hawaii – July 2000
- Resolution on Trafficking – ZI has promoted the Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons – especially women and children; Resolution adopted at 56<sup>th</sup> ZI Convention, Gothenburg, Sweden – July 2002
- Resolution to Promote the Awareness, Prevention and Treatment of HIV/AIDS – ZI has supported the efforts of the UN to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and encourages Clubs and Zontians to increase

- awareness of HIV/AIDS and its impact on women in our communities, advocate for improved programs to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS in our communities and to emphasize serious efforts to prevent HIV/AIDS; Resolution adopted at 57<sup>th</sup> ZI Convention, NY, NY USA – July 2004
- Resolution on Umbilical Cord Blood, Stem Cells and the Involvement of Women – ZI has been actively raising awareness and exchanging information to appropriate organizations and/or NGOs on the use of umbilical cord blood and stem cells so that women have a say in this matter in order to safeguard women's interests, health and position; Resolution adopted at 57<sup>th</sup> ZI Convention, NY, NY USA – July 2004

As you can see, the above international advocacy initiatives are very important to advancing and improving women's health, education, economic status and to preventing violence against women. Through the combining of our service and advocacy efforts, we can effectively enhance our good works not only at a global level, but also at a local level within our own communities. We need to keep in mind that "advocacy" is expressing support for or opposition to a cause, argument or proposal by influencing laws, legislation or – in most cases, changing attitudes and/or long time beliefs. Many of the wonderful programs and projects we do now as Zontians globally and locally advocate for women and children. "Advocacy" may be a new word recently added to our Mission and Objectives; however, Zontians have been advocating for women and children's issues for a long, long time!

### **FEMALE FACTS : Pioneer Elections**

As we get ready to exercise our political voices with upcoming November 2006 elections, we need to remember the landmark legislative elections that were held in September 2004: 582 Afghan women campaigned for election. Their biggest issue was not the fact they were women seeking office or participating in the political process. It was the fact they had no idea *how* to campaign to male voters in a highly segregated society that bars women from talking to men alone unless they are related. An Afghan-American woman provided a series of political training seminars across the country for female candidates. Her response to the dilemma was simple: Go through the men's wives. Female candidates must meet and talk with other women – at bakeries, salons, rivers where clothes are washed – who

then must talk to their husbands about a woman's campaign. Canvassing votes from men was just one of the many challenges facing women candidates then. Security and threats were other complications being faced by women wanting to become involved in the political process. Unfortunately, many women who became actively involved in the political process in 2004 have been targeted for torture and/or killed by the Taliban over the past two years since their landmark elections.

I was recently in Sao Paulo, Brazil and saw a television ad by CARE. It started out with one woman walking alone, then two, three, ten, twenty, hundreds more women of all ages, ethnic and cultural backgrounds meeting up and walking with her. Their voices came together by saying: Together, we have the Power. They stated this sentence over about 3-4 times as they walked together in confidence. The announcer then stated: Together, these women have the Power to change the world; YOU have the Power to help her do it. It then referred viewers to CARE's website ([www.care.org](http://www.care.org)) for more information. It was very moving. I encourage you to take a look at CARE's website as this organization is working with women to fight poverty and provides ideas/suggestions on how we can help. As you may recall, our most recent Past International President (PIP) Mary Ellen Bittner (Zonta Club of Washington DC USA) included CARE as one of her service projects for Biennium 2004-06.

### **DISTRICT 5 FALL GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE – "BASKETS OF PLENTY"**

The District 5 Fall Governor's Conference is scheduled for Friday-Sunday, October 20-22, 2006, and hosted by the Zonta Club of Newark. The Conference will be held at the Cherry Valley Lodge in Newark. "Call to Conference" has been mailed to all Zontians. Again, please bring any comments and/or questions you may have concerning legislative awareness and advocacy to Conference. Your District 5 Officers and Board of Directors are looking forward to seeing you in Newark!

*A better world for women is a better world!  
...PIP Mary Ellen Bittner  
Zonta Club of Washington DC USA*