

Anje Wiersinga, European and international feminist

On 5 April, during the General Assembly of INGOs of the Council of Europe, our friend Anje Wiersinga bid farewell to this forum where she has represented the IAW for more than 20 years. In spite of the restrictions concerning the limitation to one member per association of representative for each association, Gerard Ermisher, the president had agreed to make a derogation to allow her this last presence. She had come from the Netherlands, valiantly driving her beloved little Mercedes herself for this last trip.

Anje and I have been together for many years in the "old girls' network", feminist activists who worked on a European and international level to defend women's rights, eliminate discrimination against women and dreamed of seeing gender equality finally achieved. We both belonged to associations of graduate women with international connections, for me the AFFDU in France, for her the VVAO in the Netherlands, which was federated by the FIFDU, we also belonged to the IAW and both of us had had experience in foreign countries, Africa for her, and with the United Nations, Africa and Asia for me. This no doubt explains the interest we shared in the globalized dimension

It is difficult to recall here all the battles we fought at the Council of Europe and the United Nations, in particular in New York at the annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and in Strasbourg at the INGO-CoE Conference. We had an intense lobbying activity with the representatives of the Member States at the United Nations, as well as with the ministers and ambassadors of the PACE of the Council of Europe. We attended the meetings and work of the Parliamentary Committee for Equality between Women and Men, and followed for example its work on the terrible feminicides in Mexico.

We also followed the work for the elaboration and the defence of the Convention which became the Istanbul Convention.

We fought for the creation of a women's group in the INGO Commission and for the election of an equality expert.

Anje worked especially during the "Arab Spring" in Tunisia to get women from the Maghreb and the Middle East to attend and speak at our assembly.

We worked to link international and European activity by promoting the Istanbul Convention to our UN networks. Although European, it was a model for many other countries and vice versa, we raised awareness in the Council of Europe of UN Resolution 1325 on women in armed conflict. On behalf of IAW Anje even organised an event on this resolution at the Council of Europe. This event could serve as a reference for a solidarity action given the current events in Ukraine, because unfortunately the armed conflicts are still going on and women and their children are paying a very heavy price.

I think that despite this farewell Anje will continue to be interested in what our team does because in spirit she will always be one of our members and that once an activist, always an activist!

Renée GERARD

member of the IAW team at the Council of Europe.