

European Network

For the attention of all IPPF MAs

November 12th, 2019

Dear friends,

We met as the members of the EN REC on Friday and discussed the IPPF reform proposals. We thank Hans Linde from the Governance Commission for taking the time to present and answer our many questions and concerns.

It is clear to us that IPPF needs to reform. However, it would not be honest if we did not share our disappointment at how this reform came about. Crises can be opportunities but also operating from a crisis situation does not provide the best basis to deeply interrogate the real issues underlying the problems faced, and therefore is not the best foundation upon which to build.

For example, we see in the report that 'representative democracy' is being blamed as having 'failed IPPF'. We do not agree with this statement. We feel rather the abuse of representative democracy lies at the heart of the issue, and not representative democracy itself. We should not confuse the two, and we should be very careful not to lose the values and principles that lie at the heart of representative democracy.

Composition of the Board of Trustees

We are aware of the 'dual accountability' of IPPF, as Steve Sinding pointed out during our Regional Council, and we discussed substantially the issue of 'conflict of interest'. We recognize that IPPF could be described in essence as being two separate animals. One is a (large) grant giving foundation and the other is a federation of member associations. Inevitably the first implies the danger of a conflict of interest as those sitting on the board can be from organisations who benefit financially from decisions made by that same board. We therefore accept that a hybrid model which encompasses both Trustees nominated from within Member Associations and those external to Member Associations is necessary. We believe that those coming in externally should be in the minority, but we also believe that the inclusion of independents is essential given our hybrid nature. Without a clear quota, this is not a given. Thus, we support a clearer proposal of a Board of Trustees comprising 2/3 of members recruited from MAs and 1/3 external to IPPF – fixed quotas. However, we believe that the possibility of conflict of interest is significantly raised by the proposal to allow MA staff to run for the Board. We utterly disagree with this latter proposal. We also strongly object to external members being referred to as independent 'experts'. While pleased with the proposal to focus on finding the right skills and competencies for the Board, we know we will be able to recruit 'experts' from both within and outside the Federation; the primary role of the externals is to provide one of a number of necessary checks and balances in our governance system.

Election of the Board of Trustees

We agree with a strong process of eliciting and selecting nominations. However, we do not agree that the final vote on those nominations should be with the current Governing Council and thereafter with the Board of Trustees. We see inherent risks in a Board which self-perpetuates. We recommend that the final vote on Trustees is taken by the General Assembly. Requisite technological solutions exist if funding were to preclude a physical meeting. We discussed potential risks around this but felt these

From choice, a world of possibilities



can be balanced by an effective and transparent nominations procedure, with sufficient independence also built into this process to ensure another level of check and balance.

General Assembly

We welcome the proposals for the reintroduction of the General Assembly which will be the highest decision-making body of IPPF, and to which the Board of Trustees will be accountable. It is vital that the General Assembly has a robust and clear mandate to influence and decide upon the most substantial matters of IPPF. The current proposal needs to be further elaborated to ensure this.

Regional Governance

We spent time discussing regional governance. We agree that things do not need to be structured as they currently are. We were pleased to hear that our Regional Council actually served the Commission as an example when they were considering their proposals. Our RC has always been a forum for learning and sharing and in recent years, we have really focused on this aspect, and reduced the amount of formal and procedural items to the minimum required under Belgian law. Thus, we feel Regional Assemblies can work well. They should become a lynchpin of the strategic direction of IPPF's actual work, rather than its internal issues, and there must be clear and agreed processes and on how discussions and conclusions feed into the Board of Trustees. Other structures than the current REC could be developed that would focus on making these assemblies the content rich discussions that we would all like to be spending more time on. For example, we discussed a more strategic content focused regional committee who could work with RO staff to strengthen the collaboration between MAs and RO and collectively on issues related to the specific context of our region and on the Regional Assembly. We acknowledged that while there will still be formal governance required by the EN legal set-up, in essence our statutes are so tightly tied to IPPF, that 'independence' is a relative concept. It is important to ensure we meet sufficient accountability requirements in Belgium to enable us to continue to represent and raise money for the Federation (especially as likely the only remaining office in an EU member state) but we see this as no barrier to the reform as proposed. What will matter far more is our ability to develop a culture of transparency, cooperation and solidarity across the whole Federation, and the correct checks and balances within our governance – namely - as above – levels of independence in the Board (and nominations) and a strong and properly mandated General Assembly.

Youth

We welcome the continued emphasis on meaningful youth participation in the proposals and urge all IPPF stakeholders to accelerate the mainstreaming of young people through governance and all avenues of action.

Resource Allocation

We welcome the changes made in the Resource Allocation proposal, because they do go some way to recognize the absolute dearth of avenues of support for SRHR organisations in middle or higher income countries where there are still great unmet needs and where serious push-back on SRHR affects not only women and girls in those countries, but threatens global progress. We recognize that most of our core funding comes from development and international cooperation budgets, which poses a challenge for equality of support. However, this has resulted in EN losing 25% of its members within the last decade. Thus, in phase two, when restricted funding is considered, we call for a resource mobilization strategy that recognizes we are a global federation and therefore prioritizes proactive fundraising for those middle and higher income countries who are struggling against a perfect storm

of attack and lack of funding within their countries. This requires looking at the quality of the funding rather than the quantity and considering our indicators in this light. We would also request that IPPF takes on the task of educating donors about the knock-on effect of opposition activities in developed countries; e.g. Poland (ref Nairobi Summit this week) on the work in developing countries. We cannot overstate the clear and present danger of the opposition's deliberate capture of civic space wherever they can on the overall SRHR, and development, agenda globally.

The Delhi Meeting

No information has yet been sent on the process for Delhi. We would request that a clear process for the deliberations be developed and shared as soon as possible. This must provide clarity on how the topics for discussion have been selected and/or can be proposed, and on the roles and responsibilities of the delegates.

Phase 2 and Beyond

It has been acknowledged that Phase One was designed hastily and with a great lack of transparency. We call for Phase 2 to be designed and planned in full transparency, particularly the selection of people who would form a transition team and/or any committees attached to it. We do not believe the Governing Council should 'pick' a transition team but put back to the full membership a transparent process to select one. We find it important to emphasize that changes cannot be made overnight, both for legal reasons, and to ensure that this reform continues to bring people with it, so request that the transition be properly considered in terms of time required.

In conclusion

We all believe it would be a poorer world without IPPF, and we trust in the ability of the Members to deliberate and reach consensus on the reform that is needed. We have seen in Europe recently the dangers posed when democracy reverts to a 'winner takes all' concept. True democracy rests in dialogue, mutual understanding, respect for alternative positions and needed compromise by all. We urge that all delegates in Delhi to work to rebuild trust in representative democracy, and in our Federation, by attending in this spirit.

Warm regards,

Gabriel Bianchi, President
Petra Bayr, Vice President
Reinis Upenieks, Treasurer
Alice Ackermann
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cc: Members of the Governing Council
Alvaro Bermejo, Director General
Caroline Hickson, Regional Director