



## Report from Aarhus

*--or how I spent my summer vacation.*

Kurt Kaboth

*The World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees met in Aarhus, Denmark in July along side the 20<sup>th</sup> YMCA World Council. I serve as Treasurer of WFYR and was a US delegate to the World Council. Here are some of my observations and experiences.*

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### 7<sup>th</sup> WORLD CONFERENCE WORLD FELLOWSHIP OF YMCA RETIREES

The 7<sup>th</sup> World Conference of WFYR met in Aarhus, Denmark in July along side the 20<sup>th</sup> World YMCA Council. I serve as Treasurer of WFYR and was a US delegate to the World Council. We enjoyed great fellowship and reunions during this time, during the meetings, during excursions, and afterwards.

The WFYR participants met seven times over the course of the week receiving reports from the Chair, Phil Dwyer, the area vice-chairs for Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America-Caribbean, Middle East, the USA and Canada.



Our first speaker and welcome was Carlos Sanvee, Secretary General of the World YMCA. He went over the agenda for the World Council meeting and thanked WFYR participants for their support.

Other regular reports included my Treasurer's Report; Len and Joyce Wilson on our communications program ("Bridges"); Bonnie Mairs on the World YMCA Emergency Fund (Secours Speciaux); our Global Retirement Initiative projects in Kenya and Sri Lanka; and our Necrology Report.

We were fortunate to learn about the difficult situation in the Ukraine directly from Victor Serbulov, General Secretary of the YMCA of Ukraine. As the fighting

began and has continued, the YMCA prepared to provide food, clothing and medicine to the affected areas (which now includes all of the Ukraine). The set up two YMCA locations to serve as hubs for the collection and distribution of these relief supplies. All of the YMCAs in Ukraine except in the occupied area have reorganized for relief work including acquisition of supplies, children and youth programs, and even the sewing of military uniforms. It is an unstable situation and the outcomes cannot yet be predicted.



We also learned late in the meetings that the situation in Sri Lanka was at a tipping point. Our Sri Lankan colleagues described a country that was bankrupt without food, energy or cooking oils. They predicted a mass demonstration in the capital after our Conference and that has come to pass with outcomes that cannot be predicted. WFYR will continue to work with the Sri Lanka YMCA in the days ahead.



We listened to a presentation on growing religious persecution around the world by Jakob Enberg of Aarhus University and Rene Ottensen of Open Doors in Denmark (<https://www.opendoorsusa.org> --the USA site). They research and publish a World Watch List showing the most difficult places in the world.

WFYR then had its regular election of officers and Kohei Yamada of Japan was elected our new Chair. Philip Dwyer will serve as Immediate Past Chair, and I will continue as Treasurer. Area vice chairs will be:



Africa: Francis Asiema; Canada: Sol Kasimer; Latin America: Alicia Sanjurjo; Oceania: tbr; Middle East: Ghassan Sayah; Europe: Guenter Ozdyk; South Asia: Thomas Thomas; East Asia: Shigeru Shomada; and two at-large to be appointed by the new Chair.

Additionally, WFYR considered and approved a Resolution extending to the World YMCA its full support for Vision 2030 and will make efforts to support its implementation, and encourage WFYR members to support it with their local national and local YMCAs.

## 20<sup>th</sup> WORLD COUNCIL WORLD ALLIANCE of YMCAs

### Video Summary:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iInAvYfnBU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iInAvYfnBU)

The World Council met with 2,300 participants in person and by Zoom.



### World Council approves Vision 2030 and builds upon four pillars

**Vision 2030** is a Movement-wide Vision statement, Mission statement building on four key pillars of impact.

Carlos Sanvee, our Secretary General has said:

*“The world needs the YMCA more than ever. Despite the threat of disconnection, YMCAs have connected and collaborated in unprecedented ways.”*



*We have adapted, connected and reset globally. Our vision, mission and goals have been co-created for greater global impact. Let's step up, and into our future. Let's allow young people to shape it. Now is the time for one vision. It's time for our Vision 2030"*

**YMCA Vision:** Our vision is a world where every person lives in harmony with self, with society and with creation.

**YMCA Mission:** The YMCA's mission is to empower young people and communities worldwide to build a just, sustainable, equitable and inclusive world, where every person can thrive in body, mind and spirit.

The four key **Pillars of Impact:**

**Community Wellbeing** The YMCA believes that every person should have the means to grow and thrive in body, mind and spirit while taking care of their individual and collective wellbeing.

By 2030 the YMCA will co-create, provide and advocate for high-quality, relevant and sustainable health and wellbeing solutions to young people and communities worldwide.

**Meaningful Work** The YMCA Movement believes that all young people deserve the right to learn, engage in flexible dignified and meaningful work, and build sustainable livelihoods.

The YMCA commits to creating, expanding and advocating meaningful, just and equitable education, training, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in the transition to the new economies.

**Sustainable Planet** The YMCA believes that we should all commit and take action for the protection and regeneration of our Planet, preparing for a Just Transition to a world where humans live in full harmony with nature. The YMCA commits to become a Greener Movement, an active youth voice on climate justice and champion of youth-led sustainability solutions.

**Just World** The YMCA believes in the power of young people and communities to promote and advance justice, peace, equity and human rights for all. The YMCA will become a global voice in the fight against systemic discrimination, inequity, injustice and

racism in all its forms, amplifying the voices of young people and communities where it is active to ensure that everyone's voice is heard.

The bulk of the business of this Council was to build out the goals and structures of each of the pillars. 2,300 participants met in Co-Labs (smaller working groups) and Engagement Panels (larger discussion groups) to develop plans for the larger World YMCA.

### **World YMCA elects officers and executive committee**



Soheila Hayek of YMCA Lebanon was chosen as the new President of World YMCA by in-person and online voting delegates. Soheila has most recently served as a member of the Executive Committee. A citizen of four countries who has lived all over the globe, Soheila said: "I see myself as a citizen of the world, and my experience has taught me that, no matter our differences, we all face the same challenges and harbour the same hopes and aspirations."

Ronald Yam of the National Council of YMCAs of Hong Kong was chosen to serve as Deputy President. He continues his service as an Officer, having been the Treasurer for the past four years.

The newly elected Treasurer is CiCi Rojas of the YMCA of the USA. An executive and entrepreneur, she has served on the Executive Committee for the past four years.



Outdoing President Patricia Pelton (Canada) was presented with flowers from World YMCA Secretary General Carlos Sanvee, and given a standing ovation and rousing applause from attendees.

Immediate Past President Peter Posner then had the honor of announcing the new Officers who will lead the YMCA over the next four years.

The Executive Committee carries out the policies of the World Council, monitors staff, appoints the Secretary-General and maintains relationships with other organizations. It consists of the officers and the specific leaders of YMCA organizations. The new World Council-members are:

**Africa** Mr. Ronald Senghore, The Gambia; Ms. Nalisoa Andrianarivo, Madagascar

**Asia and Pacific** Ms. Karren Joy Fetalvero, The Philippines; Mr. Christopher Lewis, Australia

**Canada** Ms. Brenda Flaherty, Canada

**Europe** Ms. Lena Schickhaus, Germany; Ms. Sarah Bremner, Scotland

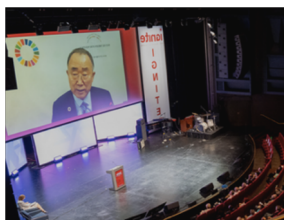
**Middle East** Ms. Maurine Kouba, East Jerusalem

**Latin America and Caribbean** Mr. Cristiano Freitas Ristov, Brazil; Ms. Anaclara Rodriguez Canzani, Uruguay

**USA** Mr. Harvin Vallabhaneni, Atlanta, USA

### Speakers, music, celebrations and cautionary work

The World Council began with a program of worship at the Aarhus Cathedral led by the Chair of the YMCA-YWCA of Denmark, a reading of the Paris Basis in five languages, and a beautiful hymn sung by the YMCA Lviv women's chorus in the Ukrainian "Archaic Singing" style.



The keynote was given by Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon who recalled the words of US President John F. Kennedy from 1962, 'Good work has no borders or nationality – are you ready to extend your helping hand to others?'. The YMCA, the Secretary-General said, is 'the world's oldest youth empowerment organization ... and a platform and network that represents great diversity, great collaboration, and great opportunity'. He exhorted

young people to be the change they want to see, and said: 'When young people are given the right tools of empowerment and the opportunity to speak and raise their voices, they become effective drivers for change.'

The World Council opened and closed with music, singing and dancing, an atmosphere of optimism that continued through the plenaries, small group meetings, excursions, meal time and at the end of the day.

Participants took thirty different excursions to see different parts of the Jutland peninsula of Denmark and the work the local

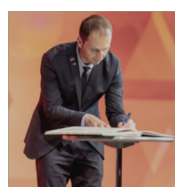


YMCAs were doing across this region. (I went to Haderslev where the Reformation began in Denmark and where the YMCA is right next to the Cathedral; and also a boy's summer camp where they competed in their weekly water competitions.)

Participants also spent an evening with dinner (after a plenary) at the Den Gamle By, or The Old Town in English, an open-air town museum located in the Aarhus Botanical Gardens. Like Greenfield Village in Dearborn, this museum preserves structures from Denmark's history from Vikings to the 1950's.

### Other items of note included"

Tom Valentine of the YMCA of the USA said, "One of the things that I think is really important is that we have greater unity of purpose, and that we do a better job of capturing and communicating our impact, because we have an incredible story to tell ... of the incredible work that we do each day in over 12,000 communities around the world. There are few organizations with greater diversity and a greater grass roots ground game than the YMCA."



The YMCA of Kosovo was formally accepted into full membership in the World Alliance of YMCAs.

Victor Serbulov, Secretary General of the YMCA of Ukraine explained

the heroic efforts their YMCAs are currently making to provide food, clothing and medical supplies to the citizens of Ukraine who suffered tremendously in the current situation.

Both active and retired representatives of the YMCA of Sri Lanka described the horrendous situation in their country, which is bankrupt, without food or fuel. (They had noted there would be the huge demonstration in their capital, Colombo; and that has since come to pass.)

The World Council approved four resolutions that came from the membership, including:

The first proposed by New Zealand, seconded Australia and Lebanon declared the YMCA World Council's stance against the abuse of children, young people and adults, and called on member organizations to strengthen their safeguarding policies and practices.

The second proposed Korea, and seconded by Sri Lanka affirmed that the YMCA Movement stands in solidarity with YMCA South Korea in its efforts to support peace on the Korean Peninsula, and to re-start YMCAs in North Korea

The third proposed by Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Sri Lanka, seconded by South Africa determined to establish a global YMCA task force for a just peace in

The fourth proposed by Sweden seconded by Ireland acknowledged that the YMCA is a peace building movement; and that a large youth population, represented by the YMCA movement, presents a unique demographic contributing to long-lasting peace and prosperity. It committed to affirm and to act to strengthen young people's voice at all levels.

### Next World Council

The next World Council meeting will be held in Toronto, Canada in July 2026.

You can find or soon find wonderful World YMCA videos of the World Council Meeting at [www.youtube.com/c/YmcaInt-WorldYMCA](http://www.youtube.com/c/YmcaInt-WorldYMCA)

Additionally, the full set of World Council daily Bulletins can or soon can be found at [www.ymca.intworld-council-news-bulletins](http://www.ymca.intworld-council-news-bulletins)



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Israel and Palestine, composed of appointed members from interested national movements, and coordinated by an externally funded coordinator, to support the East Jerusalem YMCA and Gaza YMCA in their work for justice and peace in the region. The Resolution describes certain occupations as apartheid.

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