



World IFYE President Barbara Miller Maidment's World IFYE Conference Opening Message*

Welcome friends! Greetings one and all to the 9th World IFYE Conference. A special greeting also to host families, Australian interstate exchangees, participants from the Australian P&O Shipping sponsored program, Department of Agriculture and Rural Youth Staff from around the world, and friends of IFYE. It is wonderful to see you all here.

It seems only yesterday we were all in Sigtuna, Sweden, for the 8th World Conference and my goodness, hasn't the world become a different place in the last five years. Terrorism, war, hunger, poor health, and now financial collapse plague the world's great economies and those striving to take their rightful place in the world. Modern issues such as climate change, dwindling oil reserves, cyber-crime, the growth of China as the manufacturing powerhouse and India as the emerging technology giant challenge and provide opportunities for us all.

The IFYE motto of "Peace through Understanding" seemed a very appropriate slogan on which to build a new program for youth following the devastation of World War II. But I ask you, do we understand our neighbors any better now than we did 60 years ago in 1948?

In modern times, improvement in the scope and quality of international exchange programs relies on several key issues: Democracy — providing for free choice and voluntary work to maintain and develop democracy. Knowledge — formulation of a broader and deeper knowledge of our multicultural global society. Learning — instilling in our youth and practicing ourselves the love of learning throughout life. Rural Development — holding a reverence and international solidarity for the productive rural components of our various countries and acknowledging the role of the rural sector in creating wealth and stabilizing the economy. Environmental Stewardship — building sustainability in the use of our natural resources. Gender Equality — recognizing that women as well as men as well as youth play significant roles in the development of democracy and world understanding.

Overall, attention paid to these key issues will assist in capacity building, planning and the implementation of international activities.

Five years ago, when we discussed IFYE as an agent for better world understanding, it was recommended that each of us, in whatever capacity, work personally for improving the quality and scope of the IFYE program. We stressed the need for global capacity building with particular attention to the developing nations of the world. And we agreed to continue the dialogue on how IFYE can make an impact.

So, here we are in Australia, ready to launch into a week full of activity and meeting up with old friends. Debbie Clarke and her organizing committee have put together a splendid program during which your knowledge and understanding of the land down under will be greatly increased and will hopefully leave a legacy in your mind of the people and places that Aussies call "home." I would like to particularly thank Debbie for her foresight and courage in standing up to say "we can do this" back in 2002 when the Australian Rural Youth Exchangees Association had their national meeting.

As you move through the week of touring, discussion, and host family visits, be thinking in the back of your mind...what have I done in the last 5 years to help IFYE make an impact where I live? And what are my plans for the next five years to improve my personal global understanding?

Once again, a warm welcome to the 9th World IFYE Conference - Many cultures, one country, one world...Peace through Understanding!

*Barbara Miller Maidment, Oregon-Uganda 1968, is married to Australian Geoffrey Maidment. They live in Cowaramup, Western Australia.

She has served as president of the World IFYE Board during the past five years. ☆

