

**Report presented at the WZO AGM  
on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2007 by  
Chairman Sammy Bhiwandiwalla**



Past Chairmen, Mrs Ruby Contractor, Mr Shahpur Captain,  
Mr Rumi Sethna, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Your International Board of Trustees and I are delighted to  
welcome you to our 27<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting.

Today marks the conclusion of my third year as Chairman of WZO. In many ways it was the most eventful year that I have had the honour of presiding over. Without the elixir of constant encouragement and support from my fellow Board Members and by so many friends and supporters of WZO, this task would not have crystallised into one of the most productive and successful financial years for WZO.

WZO wishes to see the community progress on all fronts and in all regions of the world. As the world body for Zoroastrians it continues to serve and protect the community's interests globally. It seeks to eradicate many social and communal injustices and inequalities by persuasion and understanding and there is some evidence that our efforts are being rewarded. We note a softening in attitudes, and there is an emergence of courageous individuals and groups who no longer feel obliged to toe the line unquestioningly.

In 2006, I reported on the very generous donation of £22,000 received from the Erach & Roshan Sadri Foundation, UK, towards the replacement of 9 mud huts with brick built cottages in the rural areas of Navsari. This project was successfully completed in the early part of 2007, providing a significant uplift to the lives of the underprivileged beneficiaries and we are indebted to the Sadri Foundation for their generosity.

The Erach & Roshan Sadri Foundation, UK also supported our application in 2007 on behalf of the California Zoroastrian Centre, USA for an education grant for £5500 for the benefit of two qualified, full-time Zoroastrian students who are studying in 12<sup>th</sup> grade high school or are undergraduate or graduate students as of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2006, majoring in Arts, Science or Engineering. The award will be made jointly with the Massiah Foundation Scholarships of California USA, and the award ceremony will take place in the autumn of this year. Once again we offer our sincere thanks to the Trustees of the Erach and Roshan Sadri Foundation for their financial support.

In November 2006, we were pleased to see the return back to these shores of the Annual Grand Charity Ball organised each year by Rumi and his wife Hilda after a year out in the Isle of Man. It was a stunning affair as usual, with glamorous ladies and elegant partners wining and dining into the late hours of the evening all in the aid of good causes. The evening ended with a super collection of £9487. To Rumi and Hilda we convey our sincere thanks for their annual fundraising effort not forgetting their constant commitment and support to WZO throughout the years.

In January this year, I embarked on a trip to Navsari and the surrounding villages to survey at first hand the results of years of funding and support provided by the generous individuals, charitable institutions and organisations, for the poor and

neglected sections of the rural Zoroastrian community. Accompanying me was Mr. Alex Burns, a Trustee of the Dennis William Richards Will Trust, Mr Rohinton Irani a Life member of WZO and my wife Ursula. Alex and Rohinton wished to appraise the results of charitable activities of WZO and other charitable institutions in India.

As a consequence of this visit I am delighted to mention that the Trustees of the Dennis William Richards Will Trust entrusted WZO with a munificent sum of £400,000 (approx Rs.3.2crores) to be distributed amongst 20 Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian charities in India. Apart from the funds allocated to WZO charity projects, external projects included the upkeep and education of mentally challenged or under privileged children and street children, physically challenged adults, homes for the aged and a hospital. The allocation of these funds has already been recorded in Hamazor and will be detailed in the annual report for 2007. The distribution is being administered by WZO through the WZO Trust Funds in India.

This was the largest single donation ever received by WZO, not to be capitalised but for immediate application towards charitable causes. We express our sincere thanks to the Trustees, Alex Burns and Jill Ruhomatally of the Dennis Williams Richard Will Trust and of course Rohinton Irani without whose intercession this munificent donation would not have been forthcoming.

Under the aegis of its annual lectures on Zoroastrian Religion, History and Culture, WZO held two conferences this year, one in New Zealand and the other in London.

WZO New Zealand successfully organised the first conference in Auckland in collaboration with the Zoroastrian Association of New Zealand. For the first time the New Zealand community had the opportunity to hear and interact with two of our internationally recognised speakers on Zoroastrianism. Shamefully a group considering themselves “truly devout Zoroastrians” went out of their way to highjack the event by malicious emails against the speakers and arranging a bogus Jashan on the same day and at the same time.

Such cheap tactics failed and Rushna Tata of ZANC wrote “In fact their very concentrated effort to keep the New Zealand youth away from the special session planned for them was met with resistance from our youth itself. First of all I would like to thank you for the help and support WZO offered ZANZ in organising the two day lecture series in Auckland on the 5th and 6th of May. It was indeed a wonderful opportunity for the Zarthushtee's of Auckland to hear speakers of the caliber of Dina McIntyre and Farrokh Vajifdar.” Our sincere thanks to both our erudite speakers. We record our immense appreciation of Darius Mistry and Rushna Tata for their combined efforts in organising this event on behalf of the New Zealand Community.

WZO London's conference hosted three erudite scholars who presented their topics to an enthusiastic audience.

Dr. Elizabeth Tucker teaches Avestan and Old Persian for the BA Hons Degree in Oriental Studies at Oxford University for 35 years. She also teaches classes on the Rig Veda, and supervises MPhil students in Indo-European Comparative Philology who specialise in Indo-Iranian.

Elizabeth Tucker discussed these linguistic methods in relation to some Avestan words and phrases from the Zoroastrian prayers of the *Khordeh Avesta*.

Farrokh Vajifdar is a Fellow (and former Vice-President and Fellow-in-Council) of the Royal Asiatic Society, and a review contributor to its Journal. He specializes in the history, languages, literatures, and religions of Ancient Iran, writes, translates, lectures, and occasionally broadcasts on foreign and national radio and television.

Farrokh spoke on "Responses to recent anti-Zoroastrian Propaganda"

A three-fold overdue response to some recent unhistorical projections: filmic distortions of a 5th century BCE Greco-Persian war episode; present-day Muslim attacks against pre-Islamic Iranian civilizations; and inter-communal polemics on recent heresies. The shaming and defaming of our ancient history, culture, and religion has been but feebly countered by the Iranian Zardushtis and Indian Jarthostis, to the extent that the denigrators have successfully maintained their deceit. Farrokh Vajifdar's studied response went some way towards unraveling such insidious viewpoints.

Professor François de Blois is a specialist on Iranian, Arabic and Semitic studies and the history of religions in the Near East and Central Asia. From 2002 to 2003 he served as Professor of Iranian Studies at Hamburg University. Currently he is employed by the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, where he is working on a research project on the recently discovered ancient documents from Bactria.

François spoke on "Zoroastrian calendars and festivals"

"The early missionary activity of Zoroastrianism has been further proven in de Blois' lecture with his scholarly references to our Zoroastrian calendar's month names showing up in recently discovered Bactrian documents, in forms somewhat different to our common usage, but clearly recognizable nevertheless. The connection with Zarathushtra and the cultural spread of Zoroastrianism since ancient times can no longer be doubted."

On 14<sup>th</sup> June, we had the pleasure of the company of Lord and Lady Bilimoria at a small reception made up of Committee Members and past Board Members of WZO with a few representatives of our major donors. Due to Lord Bilimoria's commitments we were restricted to a maximum of two hours. This was indeed a challenge, as to how we could introduce WZO to Karan in such a short spell of time. A skilful presentation was put together by Darius Motivala and modified by Soonu Engineer. The end result was worth every minute spent on it. Both, Lord and Lady Bilimoria, subsequently became Grand Patrons of WZO and I am sure the community will be delighted with this news. WZO wishes to express its thanks to Lord and Lady Bilimoria for finding the time to meet the WZO UK Board and also for the constant support his company Cobra Beer and the Cobra Foundation provides towards fund raising activities of various charitable institutions.

The vagaries of English weather promises to put paid to many an open air event but on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> August we escaped the worst and on a bright sunny day, some 160 guests ventured out to attend a fundraising BBQ, arranged by Pervize & Rohinton Irani, the doyens of hospitality, at their residence and garden.

Rohinton skilfully encouraged the guests to part with their money and with some enthusiastic bidding for a wide array of prizes and the raffle the evening drew to a close with a collection of nearly £5600. Our sincere thanks to both Pervize and Rohinton Irani for their constant help and kindness and to all the immensely generous

donors who so willingly support us each year not forgetting the army of helpers and all the attendees for digging deep into their pockets towards a good cause.

With our limited financial resources we rely very heavily on the constant support provided to WZO by the World Zarthushtrian Trust Fund, Dasturji Sohrabji Kutar Benevolent Fund and the Firuz Madon Foundation to carry out our charitable activities throughout the year. The Noshirwan F Cowasjee Medical Benevolent Fund, so ably conceived by Noshirwan, continues to assist towards the numerous applications received each year for medical/surgical treatment. Through the Fali Chotia Foundation, USA, we donate 50% towards the Scholarships that the Foundation gives from its resources to deserving students in America.

WZO Trust Funds in India raise substantial sums towards a multiplicity of regeneration and self help programs in South Gujarat. To Bachi & Dinshaw Tamboly our sincere appreciation for implementing so many worthwhile projects in India.

Our sincere thanks to WZO Vice-President Keki Bhote who's moral rectitude and kindness is a source of inspiration to all and has provided stalwart support to Zoroastrians through the US Region. Our thanks also to Dadi Engineer, President of WZO India and the India committee for their community service in India.

Our thanks also go to Toxy Cowasjee, WZO Board Member and Editor of Hamazor who deserves our admiration for extending the boundaries in journalism in what was once a modest publication.

To my fellow committee members here in London I have to declare my pleasure of working with them with never a dull moment and offer them my sincere thanks for their commitment and constructive approach during all the discussions at our committee meetings. As I have said before, if each one of us contributes in equal measure their knowledge and commitment to the WZO and it's principles we will have achieved great satisfaction in what we are doing and the results will be there for all to see.

I thank you all for taking the time to attend today's AGM.

Thank you.