

A Report on 2012 GFWC Annual Convention (Charlotte, North Carolina)

It was a pleasure for me to attend the 121st Annual Convention of the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) as a representative of the Nenkejan Women's Club of Crimea, Ukraine. It was exciting to be there with 1,100 women, representing clubs from different parts of the United States. They were members of a large organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of others worldwide through volunteer service. Held in Charlotte, North Carolina, June 14-17, the Convention officially opened with the procession of state delegates with their state flags. International Affiliates of the GFWC, mostly from Central and South America, and Taiwan, were seated in the front, in an area designated by the name of the country they were representing. A sign for "Crimea, Ukraine" marked the seat reserved for the Nenkejan Club's representative.



Parade of Crimean Tatar Flag, GFWC International Luncheon

The procession of foreign club members attending the Convention took place during the International Luncheon on June 14, attended by 400 guests. Following their national flags, each International Affiliate member entered the hall and waited by the head table as a report about the particular club's activities was read. In the case of the Crimean representative, there were two flags, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar flags. The Chair of the International Liaison Committee read the following report from the Nenkejan Club, accompanied by a slide presentation showing the Crimean club's activities.

We welcome our newest International Affiliate, the Nenkejan Women's Club from Crimea, Ukraine. Bringing together Crimean Tatar women in the arts, science and various businesses, the Club aims to maintain contact with women living in diaspora. In 1944, the entire Crimean Tatar population was deported from their homeland by the Soviet government and lived in exile for nearly 50 years. Today, as they repatriate in their native Crimea, reconstructing their political and social lives and reviving their cultural traditions remain challenging tasks. Nenkejan

clubwomen are not only rendering valuable service to their community, but also actively participating in this repatriation process.

Since its official founding in August 2010, the Nenkejan Club organized three conferences on Crimean women's history. The third conference, held in Simferopol in October 2011, focused on women's movement in Crimea, the past and present, and was attended by an international group of participants from the US, Russia, Turkey, Uzbekistan and other cities in Ukraine. The Nenkejan women also started "School for Brides," a program for young women and brides, which addresses issues in religion, health and family life. The Club's president is Zera Bekirova, a well-known journalist in Crimea, and under her direction the Club carries out an active publications program. Their quarterly magazine, titled NenkeCan, covers mostly historical and cultural topics and reflects the Club women's efforts to reach out to Crimean women living in diaspora. The fifth issue was just published in May 2012.

Later that afternoon on June 14, GFWC President Carlene Garner held a special event, International Affiliates Tea, for clubwomen representing volunteer organizations outside the United States. I attended this social event as well and participated in the gift exchange by presenting Mrs. Garner a small gift from Crimea. This was also an occasion to meet the other officers of the GFWC. The 121st GFWC Annual Convention is now a memory, a memory filled with warm, friendly smiles and a high spirit of volunteerism.

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