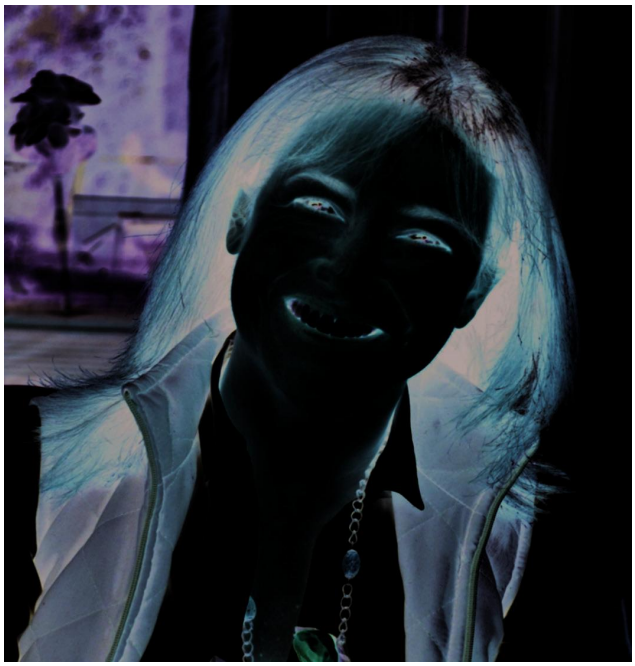
Working collaboratively and across cultures is essential to dealing with many of the world's current issues, writes Dr Maria Fernanda Arduino, President of Welcome Clubs International

Dr Maria Fernanda Arduino, *WCI President*

I would like to thank **Mrs Haifa Al Kaylani,** Founder Chairman of the Arab International Women's Forum, for inviting me to contribute with an article on WCI. It is an honour and a pleasure for me to do so. We look forward to working together in the pursuit of our goals.



Dr Maria Fernanda Arduino, President of WCI

WCI is an international, non-profit consortium that represents women's clubs from all over the world. Our clubs share a common goal of cross-cultural education, understanding and friendship. Our mission is to gain understanding through friendship, and to form friendships through understanding. In this way, we build personal connections with women in the belief that this will eventually influence positive relationships between countries. We believe we can help to achieve peace, as we strive to relate to one another with respect and care in our associations of international women. WCI acts as a forum for women from all cultures to communicate, without regard to political, cultural, or religious differences.

WCI was founded in 1986. Our founder **Marian Adair,** the wife of a US Congressman, realized that ambassadors' spouses, usually women at the time, arrived in the United States, and attended many public and social events; however, they seldom, if any, had the possibility to visit an American home. In this spirit, Marian founded Welcome to Washington, in 1959, - to open homes to ensure women from all cultures felt welcomed. This resulted in several clubs blossoming around the world. Hence, the need for a central organization to promote closer ties and to encourage communication between member clubs was essential. Since its inception in 1986, WCI has grown in both the number of member clubs and the number of members worldwide.

A Board of Directors, consisting of the President and Liaison of each member club, is the decision-making body. The WCI Executive Committee reports to the Board at its meetings. The Board meets once a year; each club has one vote. The Board of Directors elects WCI's President who in turn appoints an Executive Committee. The Executive Committee, which meets throughout the year, carries out the decisions of the Board. WCI member clubs are autonomous and located worldwide. Individuals of member clubs are members of WCI.

Today the world has grown in complexity. The need to understand one another and to work collaboratively is proving to be essential to successfully deal with many of the world's current issues. We believe the leadership of women today is necessary and needs to be fostered in every sphere. WCI would like to contribute to this aim through working to relate to women from all backgrounds so that they are leaders of peace, understanding, and compassion in their communities. The vehicle to achieve this aim is education. Our international conferences act as a forum for our members to be educated through the speakers and the exchange with international friends. Our website, The Link Magazine (our biennial publication), a Membership Directory, and Sister Club News are all excellent means of intercultural communication and education. Currently, we are working on a more interactive website to promote the online participation of our members worldwide. Likewise, we are creating a program kit to share with our member clubs to foster initiatives for the betterment of the education of women in the host countries. WCI stands for women contributing to today's world using their talents and capabilities.

> "Both personally and as Founder Chairman of the Arab International Women's Forum, I am proud indeed to have a longstanding relationship with Welcome Clubs International that dates back to my Presidency of the Federation of International Women's Associations in London in 1998 – 2000. Welcome Clubs International was a valued member of FIWAL, and I had many wonderful experiences and opportunities to speak at a great number of distinguished WCI meetings in London, Washington DC, and many other cities all over the world."
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> ***Haifa Al Kaylani, Founder Chairman of the Arab International Women's Forum and Fellow, Harvard Advanced Leadership Initiative 2017***