

Farewell to COL Chair, Dr Linda Sissons, CNZM

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Chair, Members of the Board, Advisors, Colleagues,

While all of us have realized the effectiveness of working remotely, there is one thing which cannot be done well online—that is, to *‘take a cup of kindness yet for auld lang syne’*. We’ll have to defer the pleasure of a farewell hug for another place, another time!

COL has been very fortunate to benefit from Linda’s knowledge and experience first as the Board Member representing New Zealand and then as Chair. I couldn’t have asked for a better Chair—who was always there for us with practical advice and guidance. She understood the intricacies of organisational challenges and always saw the bigger picture.

At the same Linda could join hands with us to support activities in the field. At the recent PCF9 in Edinburgh, she was spotted helping lost participants with kindly directions. As head of the COL delegation at intergovernmental meetings she made it a point to network with ministers and senior officials, introducing the organization she believed in. When accepting the role as Board Chair, Linda referred to COL as a *“remarkable organisation which, despite its small size, enjoys the commitment of countries throughout the Commonwealth and punches well above its weight.”*

It’s a difficult task to Chair an international Board that comes together only once a year and to carry everyone along. It requires hard work, but she made it look so effortless. She has ensured that the Board and Management have always been on the same side. This is critical for any organization to fulfil its mission and mandate.

Former colleagues of Linda have called her ‘determined and charismatic’, a champion of women and indigenous people. In an interview, she said, *“People who are marginalized by the education system have always been my passion. They are the ones I want to do it right for.”* This is also COL’s approach. The values of the organization and the values of the Chair came together in perfect harmony.

Linda can be great fun too as people will recall how vigorously she danced the Scottish reel at PCF 9. She has a great sense of adventure and took in the sights and sounds of the places that COL's duties took her to. She cheerfully travelled long and arduous distances for COL bringing with her an air of dignity and respect. Our Chair is very popular with our staff who looked forward to their interactions with her and will miss the chance to say farewell.

Linda, your amazing energy and sense of purpose are an inspiration to me personally. Even as this successful tenure ends, I am sure that there will be many new beginnings. Let's raise a virtual toast in heartfelt appreciation.

Kia Ora, Linda.