

## UPF Europe and Middle East conference on No more wars - No peace without women

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N.B. This report is a summary of the presentations given at the conference, and may not perfectly reflect their content. For the full content, please refer to the presenter's written speech or the video recording.

Geneva, Switzerland - An international audience of about 200 attended the event titled "No More Wars – Can We? / No Peace without Women".

The conference on the afternoon of Friday, 10 May 2024, at the United Nations Offices, Geneva, Switzerland, was organized jointly by the Europe-Middle East branches of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) and Women's Federation for World Peace International (WFWPI).

The affiliated organization International Association of Youth and Students for Peace (IAYSPP) was also a sponsor, as were the World Council of Churches (WCC), UN Women, Soroptimist International, Latter-day Saint (LDS) Charities, Fribourg Peace Forum, Geneva Interfaith Intercultural Alliance (GIIA), and NGO Committee on the Status of Women (NGO CSW), Geneva.



### Welcome and opening remarks by the organizers:

**Mr. Jacques Marion**, Chairman of UPF Europe and the Middle East, underscored the urgency for peace amidst ongoing conflicts. Mr. Marion emphasized that history does not indicate the end of religion; rather, religious convictions endure, surpassing political affiliations. In 2000, the UPF founders proposed a bicameral UN structure, including an Interreligious Council, to complement political leaders in conflict resolution.

**Ms. Carolyn Handschin**, President of the NGO-Committee on the Status of Women in Geneva, reflected on the Women's Peace Movement post-WWI, epitomized by the rallying cry "No more war." Following the outbreak of the Ukraine war, organizations like WFWPI and IAFLP advocated "No Peace Without Women," demanding partnership acknowledgment in peace efforts. Major events on this theme yielded enthusiastic responses and practical outcomes.

## Session 1: A faith-based approach to lasting Peace through reconciliation.

**Ms. Karen Bybee**, representative of LDS Charities to United Nations Offices, Geneva, ably chaired the session.



**Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay**, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, addressed the inclination of some political leaders towards aggression rather than seeking peaceful dialogue, citing conflicts in Ukraine, Russia, and Israel-Palestine. He noted these conflicts often arise from factors other than religious differences. The World Council of Churches emphasizes peace from a faith perspective, believing individuals should be agents of peace, justice, and stability. Their 2022 Assembly condemned polarization, militarization, and the misuse of religion to justify violence, advocating for dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. They promote a holistic approach to peace, encompassing wholeness, reconciliation, and healing.



Rev. Pillay proposed five strategies for lasting peace: challenging structures that incite war, advocating for justice in economic, gender, climate, and digital realms, promoting healing and reconciliation, adopting an integrated approach to global challenges, and fostering collaboration across diverse groups, including NGOs and various faiths. These strategies aim to address the root causes of conflict and create a sustainable and inclusive peace.

**Mr. Heiner Handschin**, Coordinator, IAPD Europe and the Middle East, emphasized the necessity of action in times of violence, quoting John F. Kennedy to underscore the importance of good people taking decisive steps against evil. He highlighted the vital role religious leaders play in guiding their communities and addressing global injustices. Despite their potential, religious figures are often excluded from formal peace processes. Mr. Handschin advocated for a more inclusive peace strategy involving religious leaders, suggesting the UN evolve into a bicameral institution with an Interreligious Council to enhance global peace efforts. He also connected

peacebuilding to familial roles, paralleling parenting with conflict resolution.

**Ms. Srruthi Lekha Raaja Elango**, Deputy Director at WFP Office for UN Relations in Geneva,

emphasized that differing standards of peace fuel conflicts. She shared a personal experience from Germany, where "Ruhezzeiten" laws ensure quiet nights and Sundays. As an Indian immigrant, she found adapting to these standards challenging, highlighting cultural differences. This contrasts sharply with regions in conflict, where grave violations like bombings are common. She criticized the inconsistency in global peace standards and the failure of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine. True peace requires equal standards, without hypocrisy or double standards, and treating others as we wish to be treated.



## Session 2: "No Peace without Women".

More than their roles as peacemakers, and reconcilers, women's authority to lead a call to "prevent" war was the focus of the second session of a conference held at the United Nations offices. The session, "No Peace without Women", began with an introduction from **Jacques Marion**, the regional chair of UPF for Europe and the Middle East, who served as the moderator.



**Ms. Tatiana Molcean**, the under-secretary-general and executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), was unable to be present. Her speech was presented by Hillary Murphy, the UNECE senior social affairs officer. Ms. Molcean wrote in her speech that gender equality, especially through economic empowerment, is a critical principle of the work of UNECE. She described three areas of concern in the European region:

Reaching the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5: gender equality;

Countering a growing movement that opposes gender equality;

Remedying the disproportionate impact of war on women.

She mentioned that the UNECE and UN Women will jointly organize an event in Geneva on 21 and 22 October 2024, leading up to the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, which in 1995 established a set of principles for the equality of men and women.

**Ms. Adriana Quiñones**, head of Human Rights and Development for UN Women, expressed deep concern over escalating armed conflicts worldwide, particularly in Yemen, Gaza, and Ukraine, which disproportionately affect women and girls. She highlighted the severe consequences, including civilian deaths, displacement, poverty, food insecurity, and sexual gender-based violence. Quiñones emphasized that women, despite bearing the brunt of conflict, are often marginalized in peace processes. She asserted that women's inclusion leads to more comprehensive, enduring peace. UN Women supports initiatives like training prosecutors in Guatemala to combat wartime sexual violence and involving women's organizations in Colombian peace talks.



**Dr. Svjetlana Jovic**, a conflict prevention expert with UNIFIL, highlighted that despite the UN Security Council's adoption of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security 24 years ago, women's voices remain overlooked in peace processes. Since 2018 in South Lebanon, over two dozen women have been trained in mediation and conflict prevention, convincing local leaders of the benefits. These women are now active in helping displaced families and resolving local disputes, using their mediation skills. Dr. Jovic emphasized that empowering women in peace efforts is crucial, stating that any effort in planting a seed of peace is worthwhile.



**Ms. Carolyn Handschin-Moser**, president of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women at the UN in Geneva, emphasized mobilizing to end wars through dialogue and cooperation. She highlighted women's crucial roles during and after wars, such as running businesses, holding communities together, and caring for the injured. Handschin-Moser stressed the importance of including women in peace negotiations, citing their unique skills and intimate experience with war. Despite the opportunities presented by UN Security Council Resolution 1325, she argued that women still need to be fully integrated into all conflict stages, especially pre-conflict. She underscored the significant influence women have as nurturers and influencers.

**Ms. An Monita**, vice president of Cambodia's International Association of Youth and Students for Peace, highlighted the organization's mission to inspire collaboration for true peace. She emphasized three points: the absence of women

from peace talks weakens sustainability, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is crucial for recognizing women's roles, and peace begins in families nurtured by mothers' love. She praised Cambodian women for taking leadership roles in economic development, community healing, and justice advocacy. Monita stressed the potential of young women to drive positive change, stating their voices are vital for inclusive policies, social cohesion, and addressing conflict roots.