

## UPF and WPWP UK's Conference to Promote Gender Equality in House of Lords

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Distinguished speakers attended a conference hosted by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF - UK) and the Women's Federation for World Peace UK in collaboration to promote gender equality and the elimination of violence against women.

Within the House of Lords Committee Room noteworthy speakers gathered, from successful parliamentarians to founders of well-known humanitarian projects, to mark the UN International Day of Elimination of Violence against Women. The importance of the discussion presented had filled the conference room as the speakers shared their own personal insights. The event itself was hosted kindly by Baroness Sandip Verma who oversaw the proceedings until she had to leave to vote. Each speaker had seven minutes in which to express their own perspective and understanding on the subject matter of: Ending Violence Against Women.

The proceedings began with Baroness Sandip Verma, who made a strong opening statement on the subject matter. "You are the voices that have to go out," she emphasised and further elaborated by stating the importance of women in key decision making positions. Further opening remarks were given by UPF Secretary General Robin Marsh and Margaret Ali and Women's Federation for World Peace UK's Mitty Tohma. Mr. Robin Marsh spoke about the need for a partnership between men and women where each complement one another while Mrs. Mitty Tohma drew attention to the seriousness of the subject matter by stating that one in three women have suffered from some form of abuse, whether physical or psychological. Mrs. Margaret Ali moderated most of the programme given the frequent interchange of parliamentarians as four Baronesses and one MP came and left to vote or speak in debates in the other chambers.

The first speaker, Mr. James Chespy, dived straight into the delicate subject matter by telling a moving story of a young man's experience with violence against women. The Ambassador of the White Ribbon Campaign, which strives to encourage men to prevent violence against women, spoke with sincerity and revealed at the end of his talk, that he was recollecting his own childhood. This made the account that much more impactful. "It is up to men to change the mindset of other men," he concluded strongly. Well thought of entrepreneur, Mrs. Madi Sharma gave the second talk, in which the attendees were again moved as her personal experience of overcoming domestic violence to establish eight international companies, was shared. These experiences brought to light the reality of violence against women and the responsibility that each individual possesses to prevent it. She encouraged the audience to take up the responsibly challenge and speak up in order to "Break the silence."

Mr. Peter Cox, co-founder of Croydon Community Against Trafficking, continued proceedings by illustrating how "The problems are on our doorsteps," which must be realised he urged, in order not to leave anyone behind. A youth perspective was provided next by international humanitarian, Jody Dontje, 24, whose experience as a teacher and life coach meant she had much to share within the limited time frame. She spoke of her challenges while attending high-school and how she has learnt that education is the key to bring about lasting change in a culture that currently oppresses women. Mrs. Dontje's insight was refreshing as many attendees felt inspired by all the young adult had achieved.

Two Q&A intervals allowed for the audience to participate within the discussion and for the speakers to expand upon previously made insights. The final talk of the conference was given by Ms Sarah Champion MP whose experiences in tackling violence against women made her the ideal speaker to draw the evening to a close. After the final questions were addressed, closing remarks brought the evening full circle.

The action the speakers had taken in regard to working to prevent violence against women inspired the attendees as it demonstrated that strong words must be followed by action in order for real change to come about. This event gave hope to and invigorated attendees to strive to make that change.

Mrs. Margaret Ali in her closing remarks concluded that while much had changed there was still a great deal more to accomplish before humanity as a whole would benefit from women's equal involvement in decision making whether it be in the economy, politics or other areas of life. Baroness Suttie, who had stayed for the whole programme, expressed her gratitude to the speakers and her strong desire to support the campaigns for both the Elimination of Violence against Women and Gender Equality, despite her age.