

UPF Washington, DC's Women's Day: Innovate for Change – Make It Happen

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On March 16, Universal Peace Federation (UPF) co-hosted an International Women's Day event with the Temple of Praise at the Washington Times building in Washington, D.C. The theme for the event was "Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change – Make It Happen."

Mrs. Tomiko Duggan, Sr. Vice President of UPF-USA, welcomed and reported on the World Summit event, which was held in February in Korea, and the Celebration of the Founders of UPF and True Parents to the 80 women leaders who filled the room. The program began with a prayer offered by Dr. Doris McGuffey, President of the Center for Dimensional Transformation.



The guests consisted of a mix of Christian, Jewish and Muslim women leaders and clergy who shared enthusiasm for the speakers who inspired everyone to work hard to improve the condition of women and girls today. Several supportive men also shared in the program. Notable guests came from three embassies: Ms. Florepa Saber from Albania, Ms. Fatima L. Ojckaku, Ms. Mercy Idoko and Ms. Jennifer Gray from Nigeria, and Director of the Interfaith Office of Gov. Larry Hogan from Maryland.

After lunch, Rev. Kim Fuller from the Greater Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church brought women to their feet with songs of "Every Praise" and "For Your Glory." Exaltations of "Glory and Allahu Akbar" mingled from the audience allowing all to feel a connection to the different religions represented.

The keynote speaker was Rev. Dr. Sharon Styles Anderson of the Temple of Praise Church, who attended Georgetown Law School and soon became a public defender to help those who are often underrepresented. She has worked closely with community leaders and advocates, making effective changes in Washington D.C.'s Ward 8 neighborhood for over 20 years, especially in collaboration with faith-based organizations. During those years, she worked tirelessly on behalf of the disenfranchised.

Dr. Anderson encouraged everyone to network and work together to build a strong infrastructure to help women and girls and seeks to establish a think tank to report to congress, the military and corporations. She stated that "everyone has a role to play in developing gender equality." Her clarion call for 2019 is "Move Forward."



She called for a moment of silence in memory of the tragedy of violence at the two Mosques in New Zealand, moving the hearts of the Muslim women in the audience. She said, "There is power in connection to your neighbor." She urged women to heed their own internal calling to help others, regardless of any lack or shortcomings. She said that women often struggle from a lack of self-esteem or self-belief, causing them to judge or criticize other women, even feeling jealousy. She quoted Corinthians 15:15, saying, "The eye, the ear, are all of one body. Even the feeble parts are necessary, the uncomely parts are necessary. There is no schism in the body. We are all necessary."

Dr. Anderson called on each woman to believe that she has a unique gift for God to help change this nation and the world for the better. "Think: I'm good enough, I am smart enough, be affirmed and be great." She added, "What's inside of you, no one has seen yet."

Following the keynote address, a panel of three women answered the question, "Why do you do what you do?" Ms. Hali Jilani, Advisor to the US Marine Corps working in Afghanistan, said, "I work in the area of war and conflict because women don't start wars, but they suffer more from them. I had a great mom and dad who encouraged me greatly. This privilege made me feel responsible to help mediate in the war in Afghanistan."

Founder of My Sister My Seed, Dr. Vanetta Rather, said "when something disturbs your heart it becomes your work." She works to stop the sex trafficking of girls. Most of the girls who are forced into sex labor are 12-14-year-olds. They are kidnapped, beaten and threatened into the sexual slave trade. Education is needed but it is difficult to get into schools and churches to reach young women. Girls of color are disproportionately affected. Girls need a healthy sense of self, that is the key to protecting them and allowing them to grow up naturally.

Dr. Cece Cole, President of Silk Endress, spoke on Equity Parity. She dubbed all the men in the room "feminists" for supporting this program. She said she does what she does because women need access to equal pay and equal opportunity if they are to succeed. In many parts of the world, cell phones and the internet are the only access to education and development many girls and women have. She talked about the appalling problem of 'child brides.' "They are young enough to get married but not old enough to divorce. In many countries a girl cannot get a divorce." She said everyone needs to work together to realize women's equal rights to create parity with men.

Ambassador for Peace appointments were given by Jan Du Plain of Du Plain Global Enterprises, which runs the popular "Passport" program of visiting the embassies in Washington D.C. New Ambassadors for Peace who were appointed were: Rev. Dr. Vanetta Rather Founder of My Sister My Seed, Inc., Mrs. Rahila Azam, Vice President of Mustafa Center-VA, Ms. Kimberly Fuller, Gospel Music Singer at the Greater Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church, Ms. Naila Alam and Ms. Yasmeen Durrani of Express Care.

The program concluded with a toast to lasting peace through creating good marriages and families was offered by Tomiko Duggan.