

WFWP-Austria: Securing a Culture of Peace - Women's Global Leadership

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UPF Europe and the Middle East -- UPF's International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP) co-sponsored a virtual conference on the theme "Securing a Culture of Peace: Women's Global Leadership and Mentoring."

The Europe and Middle East branches of Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) and International Association of Youth and Students for Peace (IAYSP) -- two of UPF's partner organizations -- and the René Moawad Foundation organized the conference along with IAFLP.

This was one of a series of Women's Leadership Conferences that WFWP has held annually since 2000. The international event was held on December 3, 2021, in honor of Human Rights Day.



On this occasion, first ladies and other prominent women leaders engaged in an intergenerational dialogue with their *protégés* about creating a "culture of peace."

In her welcoming remarks, **Carolyn Handschin-Moser**, the president of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women and the director of the WFWP-International Office for United Nations Relations, explained the conference's theme of intergenerational trust, understanding and cooperation based on shared concerns for peace. She emphasized the importance of creating partnerships -- such as the

organizations holding this event -- that can inherit from one another and join hands to build a future rooted in rights, dignity and responsibility. Mrs. Handschin then introduced **H.E. Nayla Moawad**, a former first lady of Lebanon (1989), who co-hosted the conference.

Mrs. Moawad, the founder and president of the René Moawad Foundation, emphasized the importance of women for successful peace processes and a peaceful society. Women leaders should take a strong stand and build bridges over societal divides, she said. Referring to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other declarations, she stressed the need for role models who enable people to live by these declarations. She called on first ladies and other influential women to promote mutually shared values and prosperity for all. Regarding the situation in Lebanon, she affirmed that women can bring about change there. She concluded her remarks by stating, "If we as women stay in contact with each other and take action together, there is hope."



Hon. Emanuela Del Re from Italy, the European Union special representative for the Sahel, said that, having encountered many women through her position, she believes women do participate in various social processes and contribute as leaders in different ways. However, in certain countries where political participation is complex and sometimes dangerous, they need more support. Moreover, the role of women often is overshadowed by that of men, which makes it difficult for them to act freely and effectively, despite being competent and skilled leaders. She gave the example of a group of women lawyers in Burkina Faso who are fighting heroically for women's rights and rightful position in society under very difficult circumstances.

In conclusion, she praised the mentoring activities of Women's Federation for World Peace. She considers this an important way to ensure that women continue through the generations to fulfill their role in society as agents of social change and thus become points of reference for women worldwide.

H.E. Dr. Maria Cavaco Silva, a first lady of Portugal (2006-2016) and a professor of Portuguese language and culture, was not able to attend the meeting, but sent a message that was read by Mrs. Handschin of WFWP. The former first lady referred to the experiences of our grandparents and parents in war-torn Europe. She believes such people attach much greater significance to times of peace. In her opinion, a lack of appreciation of the importance of peace and harmony between peoples and nations will endanger the future of our children and grandchildren.

The former first lady welcomed the initiative of the conference and expressed her hope that the spirit of commitment, dialogue, common sense and compromise in the name of a greater good will prevail. The European Union, which was established to overcome decades of conflict, can serve as an inspiration for discussion and the identification of new paths to follow, she said.

Speakers on the Panel

Hon. Dr. Neziha Labidi from Tunisia, minister of women, family, children and seniors (2016-2020), and director of women's promotion in the Ministry of Women and Family (2005-2011), stated that all development requires peace and security, and dignity is essential to human life. After posing a question on women's role today, she referred to the accomplishments of women pioneers in the region. Among those mentioned were Alyssa from Tyre in Lebanon (850 BC); the Berber queen Al-Kahina; Princess Aroua (735 AD); and Fatima el Fehrya.

In more recent Tunisian history, she mentioned the ratification of the Personal Status Code in 1956, which introduced the emancipation of women. Currently women comprise over 60 percent of magistrates, doctors, businesswomen, etc., thanks to the democratization of education. With the enshrinement of Equality Articles 46 and 21 in the constitution in 2014, women's rights were protected against emerging threats. The appointment of Professor Najla Bouden (October 2021) as the first female prime minister of Tunisia and the Arab world is the fruit of this historic foundation. Concluding with words of encouragement to women to always preserve their dignity and unity, she said, "We are not born leaders; we become them thanks to our self-confidence, our resilience and our determination."



Mag. Christine Muttonen from Austria, president of the Parliamentary Assembly at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (2016-2017), special representative for Central Asia, and a member of parliament (1999-2008, 2008-2017), addressed gender inequality and ways of dealing with it. To secure peace and well-being, she said, more women are needed in parliament, public administration, diplomatic posts and the UN peace mission. Security Council Resolution 1325 needs to be implemented, she said.

Research demonstrates that women's involvement in public life decreases violence, supports peace and security, creates healthier communities, stronger economies and greater awareness of climate change, she said. Her background as teacher, parliamentarian and president of OSCE PA caused her to reflect on the need for greater female involvement in foreign policy and more gender-balanced societies. She believes schools can stimulate the interest of young people, especially girls, in politics through classroom discussions and debates on current affairs.

As OSCE PA president, she placed women and security high on the agenda. As the second female president of the OSCE PA to be elected within 25 years, she encouraged the current president, also a woman. Thus, role models, networking and raising awareness among women, while showing respect across party lines, can encourage other women to become active. Family-friendly working hours and childcare support also help. "Women are crucial in all areas of social life, when it comes to security, peacekeeping and peacebuilding," she said.

Hon. Edlira Çepani from Albania, national coordinator for the women's network "Equality in Decision Making" and a former member of parliament, described the women's network that was created in 2008 from all political parties and backgrounds. Including members of the media, business and civil society, it has promoted gender equality in Albania. Women leaders cooperate despite differences, which is essential for economic development and democracy in the polarized atmosphere of Albanian politics, she said.

In Albania, women comprise 33 percent of parliamentarians, 50 percent of local council representatives, and 70 percent of environmental representatives, Mrs. Çepani said. They still encounter obstacles as they climb the career ladder; they face stereotypical behavior and views, or they lack confidence and visibility, she said.

Regarding Resolution 1325, Mrs. Çepani emphasized that women are the main victims of violent conflict but have no preventative role. Thus, she encouraged women to gain their rightful position, participating in decision making and becoming role models.

Quoting an Albanian proverb, she said in conclusion, "An eagle needs two wings to fly." She explained that one wing is men and boys; the other, women and girls. Therefore, we should keep investing in family values and future leaders who want to make a change so that our eagle can fly on two wings, she said.

The session moderator, **Kyung In van de Ven Oliveira** was born and raised in Amsterdam and has been a youth representative of WFP Europe since 2011, and of the Dutch WFP chapter since 2014. She recently joined the UN WFP-I team in Vienna and currently works at the national guardian institution in the Netherlands as a legal guardian and child's advocate for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers.



Youth Representatives

Marlies Ladstätter, president of IAYSP Austria (since 2020), a volunteer in the Oceania Leadership Team (2009-2011), Vienna youth coordinator UPF-Austria, assistant to the Management Board of the Austrian Red Cross (2020), and pursuing a master's degree in international peace, said that service projects in Fiji and Solomon Islands taught her the importance of embracing strangers as family members. Thus, she recommends that young people volunteer to help those less privileged. The purpose of YSP-Austria, she said, is to empower youth and students to become global citizens through education in personal development and peace projects with a focus on current community-based concerns.

Mrs. Ladstätter said she considers peace to be rooted in respect and service to others. A mother generally teaches her children to treat others well and forgives mistakes, she said. Women leaders have a similar role and are adept at communicating and mediating. Research shows that women tend to lead more inclusive decision-making processes, execute more sustainable peace agreements, and manage more profitable companies, she said.

Oussama Kebir, an officer in the Tunisian army, weapon systems engineer, and doctoral candidate in artificial intelligence from the Higher Institute of Management, University of Tunis, expressed his views on the importance of a culture of peace and the steps required to achieve it. He considers human rights essential as people around the world desire freedom and equality. Human rights include the right to live in a society free from violence, torture and any forms of cruel punishment and unjust imprisonment.

He highlighted key elements of a culture of peace, which he emphasized is much more than the absence of conflict. A culture of peace, he said:

- includes deterrence, disarmament and social development, democratic participation, gender equality, freedom of expression and respect for human rights;
- requires transformation of individual behavior in the transition period, as it is a life-long learning process, requiring an integral approach to prevent the outbreak of violent conflicts;
- tackles problems at the root to solve conflicts and encourage negotiation between opposing factions;
- offers equal education opportunities to boys and girls to prepare them for the job market;

- provides education on peace and conflict resolution from an early age.

Elarinda Xhindi from Albania is a lawyer and author; participant in conferences and seminars on emotional intelligence, teamwork, career management, public speaking; certified in child-friendly law by the Council of Europe and human rights education for law professionals; and a novelist (*Values Never Go Out of Fashion*, 2021). She called on women to unite and support each other to achieve success. Despite ongoing difficulties due to inequality and prejudice, women are becoming more powerful, comprising 75 percent of political representatives in Albania, she said.

Mrs. Xhindi highlighted the following qualities of good women leaders: high level of expertise in their field; strong character development; self-confidence; role models in maintaining a culture of peace in their family.

She also listed the following challenges: indifference of youth to societal issues; domestic violence and family turbulence, with women as victims; physical, verbal and sexual abuse of children; poor education for children when a single mother has her own career; financial instability when women lack personal income or have very low income; women serving as caregivers for children, elderly parents and grandparents;

She concluded, "The more women become present in so-called non-traditional roles, the more impact they create; the more creativity, value, practicality and energy they bring."



Global Women Peace Ambassador Awards

The moderator of the awards ceremony, WFWP-Italy President Elisabetta Nistri, referred to the vision of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the co-founder of WFWP, IAYSP and UPF: the creation of a world of peace that is not just a dream but becomes a reality through working together daily and caring for each other, especially those in need.

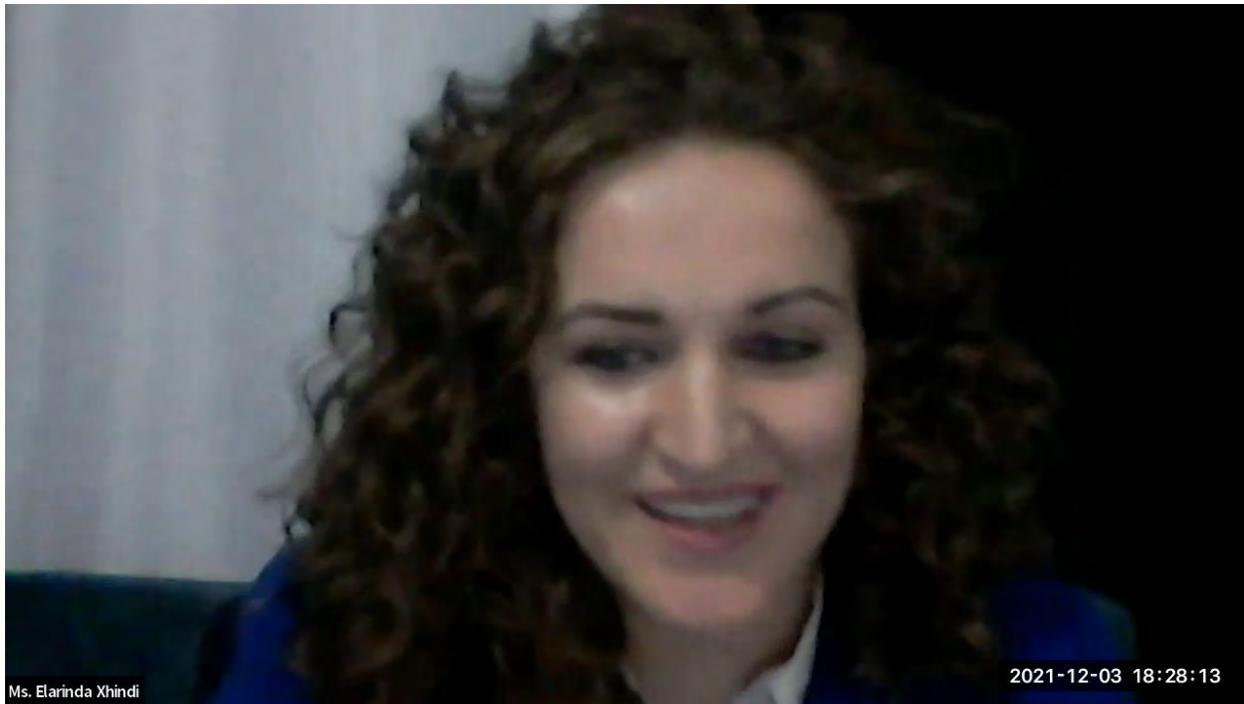
Mrs. Nistri introduced three outstanding women who were chosen to receive special awards: a certificate recognizing them as Global Women Peace Ambassadors and a donation of €500 each to support their work for peace. After announcing the awardees, she invited each of them to offer a short message.

H.E. Rabab S. Sadr, the chair of the Imam Sadr Foundation, supports the development of the marginalized population in Southern Lebanon. Following the abduction in 1978 of her brother, Imam Moussa Sadr, she has worked constantly to maintain the foundation's activities despite extreme challenges, engaging with local Lebanese communities on health, education and empowerment projects, promoting dialogue and reconciliation. She has always sought to empower the oppressed and advocate for their rights. Mrs. Sadr was unable to attend the ceremony but was represented by her son.

Christelle Ollandet, assistant to the ambassador of the Republic of Congo in Italy, and the co-founder of the Ollandet Savane school complex and founder of Winner Park, both in Brazzaville, explained that, because there was no school in her town, young girls became market sellers and married very young. In 1995, she created a school to serve low-income families. It started with 50 students, now has 2,500 students enrolled each year and more than 10,000 graduates, many of whom hold responsible positions in public and private enterprises. The school educates children to become responsible members and leaders

of their community and nation.

Irina Bogacheva, secretary of the Expert Council on Education, State Duma of Russia, and president of the charity fund "Revival and Hope" (created 2009), explained that the fund provides underprivileged, talented children and disabled children with educational opportunities. It promotes traditional family values, intercultural dialogue and cooperation, supports families in need and helps orphans to find their families. Its motto is "Give love and kindness, and do even small things with great love." During the pandemic, the team has focused on helping families in need. More than 5,000 children have received clothes, educational materials and books. Mrs. Bogacheva and her associates are in constant contact with families from different parts of Russia and ready to offer assistance.



In her concluding remarks, Mrs. Nistri thanked the conference attendees for contributing to the realization of a better society. She said that having this conference was a fitting way to celebrate Human Rights Day and wished great success to all the participants in their endeavors for peace. The program concluded with a beautiful presentation with music that showed pictures of the many humanitarian projects supported by over 110 WFPW chapters worldwide.



René Moawad Foundation

The René Moawad Foundation was created on November 22, 1991, on the second anniversary of President René Moawad's assassination. He had been elected president of the Lebanese Republic on November 5, 1989, and was killed 17 days later. He is remembered as a believer in the unity of the Lebanese people who actively strove toward civil peace, dialogue, national unity and the equality of all Lebanese citizens.

The idea for the creation of the foundation came from the late president's wife, Nayla Moawad, a former minister of social affairs and a member of parliament. She and other prominent members of the Lebanese civil society worked together to create a foundation that is inspired by and dedicated to the principles that President René Moawad strove to uphold throughout his life.



Since its creation 30 years ago, RMF has worked tirelessly to develop and enhance Lebanese society through improving education, economic empowerment, providing social and health care, and promoting democratic values to the most marginalized and neediest communities throughout Lebanon.

As RMF has grown and evolved over the years, it remains true to its roots and values in honor and remembrance of President René Moawad, whose desire for a better Lebanon will never be forgotten.

