

## Women as Turning Point for Peace - Global Women's Peace Network Conference

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In Long Island, NY in a stylish Marriott Hotel was WFWP USA's launch of the Global Women's Peace Network (GWPN) in the Northeast with over 70 people in attendance. Women from diverse professional and life backgrounds came to learn and share with each other about how women are the key to turning this world around towards peace. In the intimate setting, one could feel the turning point theme echoed in the warm circular shape of the room, manifesting the embracing heart of women and its power to include all on the path to peace.

The program kicked off with an introductory video of WFWP International and all its countless efforts in creating one world living in harmony as one family. The gathering then took a moment to acknowledge, remember and honor the beloved veterans, giving thanks to them for enabling us to live in peace and reflecting on works still to do to create peace.



Professor Yeon Ah Moon, President of WFWP International, graciously welcomed all guests. She addressed how at the moment there is no center in society, our nation or the world. We're coming together to build a peace culture - that of living for the sake of others and bringing out feminine leadership qualities (the motherly heart that cares for others). It is love and responsibility that will bring us closer to a harmonious world - peace starts with me. She reminded everyone that the blessings America received is not only for itself, but it is to be a nation that can help others - bring unity, harmony, and peace.



After the welcoming remarks, Angelika Selle, President of WFWP USA, introduced the GWPN, saying that the turning point is really the change and development over the years and now is the time for gathering all that was sown and to go up and beyond in promoting and creating lasting peace! President Selle explained that WFWP is not a feminist organization but rather feminine - in that the feminine qualities of women reflect that of a mother who melts away hate and can give birth to a new way of life.

President Selle outlined GWPN's three areas of involvement: 1. Women's leadership, 2. Family (where family members learn values and respect), and 3. Environment (physically and spiritually). "Peace is relational - together we can make a difference!"

To further nourish our spirits, Makiko Taguchi, an accomplished violinist, performed two songs, one of which was a beautiful rendition of "You Raise Me Up." Tears came to many eyes and Mrs. Taguchi received a standing ovation.

This primed us for an exhilarating panel discussion and QandA. Five professional women shared in their own way and through the lense of their expertise how women are the turning point for peace. Each one portrayed competency, dignity and professional success, but each also showed such deep passion, positivity and clear anchor in their lives - that of a strong spiritual inclination and love towards God and creating peace. Most of all, each strongly pointed to ACTION! It's no longer time to talk about peace but to BE and BUILD peace.



The first panelist, Audra Hajj, CEO of Phoenix Business Cycle, revealed an incredibly tumultuous childhood in the foster care system, but she had made the decision to move forward in life and spread kindness one person - and one smile - at a time, and to help others live a strength-based life.

The second, Ester Davis, television show hostess, writer and media specialist, talked about communication and media, and how that creates family values. She implored the audience that women as a turning point can use the media and government processes to promote the values and peace in our families, communities, media and culture.

The third, Astrid Fidelia, CEO and Founder of Stand Up To Poverty Inc. spoke about how there simply cannot be peace where there is poverty. Therefore, peace must be the baseline mission of all organizations. Peace work is challenging, but it can be done. She urged us to look for the opportunities to be kind - show a smile or share a word of encouragement. When we can love people in all areas of life, we give them permission to do the same. We have a seed to plant - will it be for hate or for peace? Focus on all the blessings we do have and use them to move forward.



The fourth, Grace Valera, former diplomat who worked in the Philippine embassies in Spain and Washington, DC, spoke on her experiences promoting cross-cultural understanding. She started with the famous quote from Eleanor Roosevelt: "A woman is like a teabag - you can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water." She shared about her experience as a diplomat and how her life's focus has been to always find a peaceful solution. She particularly shared her passion for the arts and culture, and how she advocated for and promoted peace through the cultural arts.

The final panelist, Dr. Elaine Duval, author and founder of the Daughters of Zion Restorational Ministry, discussed the role of women in building peace and building a nation. She strongly stated that the source of the vision for a nation is only God, and we must go back to that source for our direction. And women are specially equipped to demonstrate the peaceful values of compassion, empathy, mutual prosperity, etc.

A lively QandA ensued with questions directed towards how to best use media and language to bridge the gap between generations, resolve conflict, multiply peace efforts, and more.

After a delicious lunch prepared by the Marriott hotel staff, media personality Arooj Arooj from WFWP Canada recited a self-authored poem about Buddha - offering an uplifting message of peace to us all.

If our spirits were not uplifted already, Joan Myers, renowned gospel singer sang "Heal our Land" and "Don't Worry" by Bob Marley, which had the whole room on their feet, dancing and singing along.

This set the tone for an invigorating discussion where participants brainstormed projects that would be proposed to the GWPB committee. Project proposals ranged from helping women learn how to legislate and lobby for what they really want in their communities and state - even on the level of a spiritual approach - to promoting families to eat dinner together by creating "Peace Cards" as conversation starters at dinner time. The vision is being put into action.

Finally, a stirring call to action was given by Fannie Smith, WFWP Schools of Africa Coordinator, urging

the audience that the GWPN is no girly club - it is a network of women of real action and substance, and we are here to support and promote each other to do even more great works. The turning point is that we can turn the world around in each of our own unique ways. Everyone declared: "I am the turning point for peace!"



**Reflections:**

**Astrid Fidelia:**

"I was moved by being in a room full of powerful women who are selfless and making the world a better place. The leadership and kindness I saw really made me feel at home. They have a like-minded vision and it's fueled by love. I am so empowered and inspired."

**Dr. Elaine Duval:**

"I was inspired by the power of the sisterhood of peace and love, by the sense of unity of spirit and of purpose as peace-makers. I am leaving this conference feeling convinced that I myself am a "mother of peace." I will now go forth and produce, give birth to peace, for the healing of our families and nation."



**Nadya Hinson:**

"It's when we are lukewarm that we lose a nation."

**Cynthia Myers:**

"What I gained from the conference is that this is no longer dress rehearsal, that we're there, we're not

even on the brink, we're into it. We're into it and we can't go back, there's no way to go back, we can only go ahead, and by being with this group of women I can see so many people in so many areas that are primed and ready to go. I'm amazed by the people that have been gathered here. So that impressed me so much to finally see the gathering of all kinds of women coming together, and they are so excited - we're not in dress rehearsal."

**Behnoosh Sethna:**

"What I learned is being thankful of the little things... and that we are all privileged, as one of the speakers mentioned, and that we can make a change and bring about the difference. Just being thankful of all you have and look at things in a positive way and make it better, too - don't look at the dark tunnel, look at the brighter future."



**Ariella Toren:**

"I really liked the discussion tables toward the end - I felt like being able to get feedback from other members of the group could really help us think bigger and think beyond our personal ideas. I think when we were able to bounce things off of each other, there's just better results than what we can come up with on an individual level. We know that change ultimately starts with us personally, you know, peace starts with me, that type of thing, but it does take a collective effort to create mass change. So I really loved the discussion tables, it was inspiring for me to meet with people of different backgrounds and different skill sets - all those play into how we're able to come up with ideas."

"My main takeaway - I felt empowered. I think when we come and we listen to panelists which are great, what is helpful is when you feel empowered from within. And you can feel empowered from within when you feel you are of value and you can contribute. So I feel in this discussion where there was that give and take energy, people felt empowered, they felt that my opinions matter, and I'm contributing to something bigger. So for me that was a huge takeaway - we know that change can start on a small scale and reach out. One of the women talked about Martin Luther King being a single individual who created immense change in the world. So we do know that it is possible and that it does impact other people."

