

## Making Earth A Better Place: WFWP Toronto, Canada Celebrates Women's Day

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A group of about 60 gathered on Saturday, March 23, 2019, for WFWP Toronto's 13th annual celebration of International Women's Day at the Canadiana Restaurant in Etobicoke centering on the theme, 'The Essential Role of the Family in Securing Social Protection'.

Emcee Yulia Tarasova kicked things off with some fun icebreakers discussed at each table which included: "would you prefer to be 20 minutes early or 10 minutes late?" and "if you had to choose would it be a terrible short term memory or a terrible long term memory?" and finally sharing which woman had the most influence in each person's life. This was followed by an excellent lunch and a song in Japanese from a group of young female volunteers preparing the atmosphere for the main program.

It began with a report by Lilly Tadin, President of WFWP Canada, of her recent experience at the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women. She went to New York with Arooj Aarooj, a well-known local media personality, who later shared some words and a wonderful poem, "I am a woman, I am a mother, I am blessed." Lilly was moved by the words of António Guterres, Secretary-General of the UN, who said that "today what matters is to listen to the voices that are making a difference and they belong to women" and that "the truth is that when women are at the table, the chance of sustainable peace increases."



She also shared about the success of the ten WFWP schools in Africa, which was a perfect segue to the main speaker, the [Hon. Dr. Jean Augustine](#), who was a school teacher and principal prior to her involvement in Canadian politics as a member of parliament (MP) and Federal Cabinet Minister for the Status of Women under then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien.

Dr. Augustine began by quoting Nobel Prize winners Desmond Tutu, "If I stand tall, I am standing on the shoulders of so many" and Nelson Mandela, "What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead". She then challenged us to reflect on whether we are making the space we take up on the earth better by our presence before exploring the theme of the role of family and social protection in great depth.

After defining the family, Dr. Augustine shared its role in social protection as providing care, food, shelter, security, schooling as well as its importance in teaching about cultural norms, religious and spiritual roots and how to connect to each other and the world. She then turned to the challenges:

economy, housing, employment, the stress on the "sandwich generation" who are simultaneously taking care of old and young, and the need to make a time and place to communicate, discuss and decide together. She ended with the haunting words, "Let it not be said, and said to my shame, that life was better here before I came."



After another musical interlude by our young volunteers, singing 'Where Peace Begins', the Hon. Harinder Mahli, former MP and Minister of the Status of Women for Ontario, expressed her gratitude to Dr. Augustine as a pioneer for those such as herself, and discussed the need for women to keep moving forward. In particular, she encouraged those present to educate men to support the creation of an environment for girls to excel and achieve lofty goals. The day ended with a raffle and laughter, and many lingered in animated conversation.

