

WFWP USA: Bridge of Peace, a Chance for Conversation and Reconciliation

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Beyond Ceremony: Bridge of Peace, a Chance for Conversation and Reconciliation, One Pair at a Time

New York - After 27 years, the WFWPI brought back the Bridge of Peace Program at the auspices of the UN in New York in time for the Commission on the Status of Women 70th Session. WFWP USA was honored by the opportunity to support this historic program.



"The last time we conducted the Bridge of Peace Program at the UN was 27 years ago. Today, we will do it once again to show to the world leaders a model of peacebuilding through forgiveness and reconciliation," said Merly Barlaan, WFWPI Vice President for Administration and UN Relations Offices Director.

Some 125 guests came to the Luncheon event on March 12, 2026, at the UN Delegates Dining Room hosted by Kaileigh Moffitt, WFWP North America President.

WFWP President Moriko Hori and Dr. Taj Hamad, chairperson of the Universal Peace Federation International, opened the event and welcomed guests.

Keynoting the event was Ms. Anna Eleanor Fierst, historian and Board chairperson of the Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill. Fierst is the great granddaughter of US First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, a

diplomat and human rights activist and crafter of the UN Declaration of Human Rights.



Fierst comes from a long lineage of Roosevelt women activists. Her mother, Eleanor Roosevelt Seagraves, 98, is the daughter of Anna Roosevelt, the eldest and only daughter of FL Eleanor Roosevelt.

In her speech, Fierst recalled the activism of her great grandmother as constant, energetic, and mindful of the plight of others. She believed that Roosevelt's legacy, the UNDHR, had often been underappreciated, but was central in peacebuilding and keeping wars at bay after WWII.



Dr. Katarina Connery, WFWP USA President explained that the Bridge of Peace is a special program designed to celebrate reconciliation, unity, and lasting peace among individuals and families. It uses personal and historical lens, pairs who cross the bridge of peace go through dialogue and commitment to achieve personal peace and global understanding.

Fierst was paired with a family friend Ms. Alexa Ward in the bridge crossing ceremony, having reconciled old family conflicts on politics. For the national pair, Anastasia Takhnenko of Russia and Yuliia Tarehchuck of Ukraine.

The third pair was given to models of women leadership - Dr. Jennifer Okeke, chairperson of the National Women's Council of Ireland, and Penny Rankin, president of the National Council of Women of Canada.

Four women leaders were given the Global Women Peace Ambassador Awards: Dr. Raina Massey, founder of the Church of New India in New York, Karen Davila, UN Women National Goodwill Ambassador for the Philippines, Ivanna dela Torre, Systems and Behavior Change Advisor KayaROI, and Maria Isabel Buencamino, leadership coach and founder of the Women of the World.

In closing the Bridge of Peace Program, Barlaan said that peace is achieved beyond treaties and legal action, but of inner peace propelled by authentic mutual forgiveness and humility on a personal level.