

IAFLP: 1st Ladies Highlight Women's Role in Securing Peace - World Summit 2025

Blessie Dhakal

April 12, 2025

International Coordinator, IAFLP



Seoul, South Korea – An upbeat and inspiring program, hosted by the International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP), brought together dozens of prominent and influential ladies from around the world to discuss the role that women play in promoting a culture of peace. The meeting took place on April 12, 2025, as part of World Summit 2025, in the Lotte World Hotel in Seoul.

In her welcoming remarks, **Mrs. Moriko Hori**, president of the Women's Federation for World Peace, said that the heart of peace begins in the family, starting with a woman's innate capacity for nurturing and love. She spoke of connecting minds and hearts across borders through a "culture of heart," and of women leaders carrying out their roles with compassion and understanding. Mrs. Hori called upon all those present to join in weaving threads of dialogue, trust and cooperation into a tapestry of peace, and spark changes that resonate across generations and toward the future.



Dr. Julia H. Moon, general director of the Universal Ballet, spoke on behalf of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, co-founder of UPF. She praised the assembly's efforts in advancing women's leadership, strengthening the family and resolving to address global challenges. She explained the dedication of the Cheon Won Gung Peace Palace, to take place the next day, as a historic unveiling of a global center for the advancement of world peace, interfaith harmony and unity of humanity as one family under God.

Dr. Samia Burton, co-chair of IAFLP-USA, emphasized that women represent a powerful force for change. She explained the role of first ladies as "bridging divides, inspiring change, and leading with grace and conviction," reaching the hearts of families, communities and entire nations. She explained that women, as architects of peace, need to draw upon collective experience and wisdom rather than force, working with compassion, diplomacy and commitment to justice and equality.

Madam Signe Zeikate, the first lady of Costa Rica, then addressed the gathering. Pointing out that Costa Rica is the oldest democracy in Latin America, she stressed the democratic principle of ensuring that every voice is heard, including those of women. She explained that Costa Rica has achieved a 50-50 ratio of men and women in public office. The involvement of women has enhanced economic growth and environmental sustainability, she said, with major issues resolved through dialogue rather than force.

Madam Zeikate explained that women are still the primary family caregivers, suggesting that this role could be better balanced in the home.



Madam Fatima Vila Nova, first lady of Sao Tome and Principe, described her nation's culture as one in which everyone is considered family, which prevents extreme conflict. Opposing groups and different cultures treat each other as brothers and cousins, who are able to sit together and share meals, even as political antagonists. Her country is working to improve a support system for needy and single mothers, and to hold perpetrators accountable for sexual abuse and domestic violence. She added that her country's many promising young people will lead the nation to prosper.



Madam Ida Odinga, wife of the former prime minister of Kenya, described the current status of women worldwide. She said that women are serving in international forums, and represent 22% of cabinet members globally; in 141 countries, more than 3 million women hold elected positions. Societies that empower women in education, civic and economic life are more prosperous and peaceful. In terms of peacebuilding strategies, Dr. Odinga described her own efforts to diffuse conflict following Kenya's 2007 election, where grassroots community mobilization led to peace agreements prevailing over violence. She recommended prioritizing the inclusion of women in peace processes, addressing the root causes of conflict, and promoting gender equality.



Dame Patience Jonathan, former first lady of Nigeria, described her country's peace initiatives, which include peace advocacy in the various states; convening a National Summit on Peace, Security and Development; a National Youth Peace Concert; and the distribution of relief materials to internally displaced persons. She pointed out that families can only contribute to community development if they have a strong economic base. She started an organization, A-Aruera Reachout Foundation, to offer skills acquisition programs to families in need. She encouraged involvement in such programs by government, corporate bodies and well-meaning individuals.

Madam Hilda Patricia Argueta de Morales, former first lady of Guatemala, said, "Peace begins with a

smile." She named four pillars needed in society: 1) Strong families as a foundation for a strong society and prosperous nation; 2) Arts, which have a transformative power and can build bridges of understanding; 3) Women's empowerment, which advances communities and countries; and 4) Global cooperation as the key to peace and prosperity. She explained projects in Guatemala that promote these goals.



Madam Callista Jennie Mutharika, former first lady of Malawi, said her country is often called "the warm heart of Africa." She said Malawi's national peace policy ensures that "peace is not just the absence of conflict; it is the presence of courage, the courage to listen, to compromise, and to unite." She described how villagers support each other in hard times, and the power women hold in building bridges between communities.

Madam Emilia Patricia Alfaro de Franco, former first lady and senator of Paraguay, described her country's efforts to aid rural women through programs dealing with reproductive health, prevention of violence against women, childcare, and economic empowerment. Since 2018, more than 175,000 women have been served. Other programs provide loans to female heads of households, help for women in setting up businesses, and training as forestry technicians or managers. She also stressed the importance of strong families, and of teaching solid values and principles to children.



Madam Shiranthi Rajapaksa, former first lady of Sri Lanka described the attributes of women in fostering peace: the ability to settle conflicts before they worsen, a nurturing attitude, patience, and a diplomatic approach. She said that women have played critical roles in post-war reconciliation in advocating for truth, justice and healing. She said that women need to be empowered with education and leadership opportunities. She encouraged participants to take practical steps in their own societies and countries, promoting interfaith and cross-cultural dialogue, as well as peace education in schools.

Madam Reema Harrysingh-Carmona, former first lady of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, spoke of women as the backbone of society, and the need to nurture an environment for peace by ensuring a balance between men and women in political structures. She pointed out that UN Resolution 1325 gave credence to the role of women in advancing change and curtailing conflict, and said this should be reflected in the corridors of power. She also mentioned Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, as an exemplary program, where women are placed in effective positions and in all facets of economic, social, and political life. She said that women have a defining and essential role in sustaining peace and development.