

WFWP Europe and Middle East Nordic Conference: Women Peace and Security

Mitty Tohma
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Event to encourage co-operation between WFWP Nordic chapters with Presentations on women as peacemakers, empowering women, how to support integration of newcomers to Nordic countries, healing trauma.



On August 3rd, 2024, Women's Federation for World Peace Finland with the support of WFWP Sweden organized Nordic conference at Backby Manor, in Espoo which is part of the capital region of Finland. Altogether 40 participants came from Nordic countries, Finland, Sweden and Norway as well as from the UK and Ireland.

The theme of the Conference was and *Women Peace and Security* and aligning with WFWP International's annual theme. A wide range of topics was discussed during the one-day conference.

Mitty Tohma, the President of the European WFWP attended this event and spoke on topic *Many Pathways to Peace: The Role of Women in Peacebuilding and Security*. She talked about some courageous women, who impressed her, who had taken action in their nations, while facing civil war, ethnic cleansing or other atrocities. One of them was Leymah Gbowee, who during the civil war in Liberia gathered women to fight for peace after seeing her country being destroyed; women and girls being raped, children and fathers dying. These women were able to push the members of the government and the war lords to sign peace treaty.

She also brought out two ladies from Northern Ireland, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan Maguire. These ladies after personally having experienced the strife between Catholics and Protestants, met at kitchen table trying to find solutions to stop the violence between these groups and ended up starting a

peace movement.

Mrs. Tohma pointed out that ordinary women from grassroots can make difference. These three women, Leymah Gbowee and the two Irish ladies started from grassroots level and ended up receiving Peace Nobel Prize for their role in peace building in their countries.



Mitty Tohma explained how NGOs from grassroots can participate in decision making by advocacy and diplomacy for example by sharing about situations of the grassroots to the decision-making parties even with governments. She talked about the role of WFPW at UN bringing women's voice heard. Also, she shared about WFPW activities in developing countries, eg. creating projects and providing microloans for women to help them establish financial security in difficult situations.

Mrs. Britta Houston, the president of WFPW Sweden, encouraged participants to become lighthouses, to bring vision of hope in this world facing many troubles.

She introduced two activists from Sweden, Rokeya Bekum and Bathinor Abudureyimu, from Mamma United organization. They shared on topic The Role of Mothers as Peacemakers.



Ms. Bekum has been involved in grassroots activities in her native country Bangladesh as well in Sweden, has been entrepreneur, and is currently working with Mamma United. She shared about her role at Mamma United to support immigrant mothers to be able to integrate in Swedish society, to understand how the country operates, what are the rights of people, and how and where they could get help and assistance if needed. Mamma United creates places and opportunities for immigrant mothers to speak Swedish, which can be the key for integration. Important is to create a trusting relationship, so that the mothers can also share their concerns for example with growing children or other issues.

Mrs Bekum shared how she has for the past eight years returned to her village in Bangladesh to help those in need, after collecting money for the projects in Sweden. She has been helping to build homes, to send a child for surgery to be able to walk, make water pumps for families jointly and so on.

Ms. Abudureyimu has been 20 years in Sweden and has been working as a teacher and is working through Mamma United to support women, teaching Swedish language. She has established The Swedish Uyghur union in Sweden in 2022. She told she connects to many people also journalists to find ways to help Uighur people and to let people know of the genocide going on in their homeland East Turkistan and to stop it.

Ms. Nosaiba Ahmad representing Finnish-Syrian friendship association discussed on how integration of newcomers to Finland could be smooth. She pointed out how learning Finnish language, cross-cultural interactions, encouraging intercultural dialogue can foster feeling of shared experience and belonging, which are keys for being part of the society. She emphasized the role of mothers in the family and society and how it is important to empower women to integrate in new cultural environment. Also, as we build bridges between diverse communities, we can realise more harmonious country for all.



Ms. Johanna Kare, photographer artist, showed her video exhibition Don't hit, where women having experienced domestic abuse told their stories, and exhibition I AM of persons surviving from car accident and losing their limbs.

She shared how human faces tells her stories and how she has photographed homeless people, prisoners, disabled couples, people bullied at schools, veterans and women who were in the frontline of war, and through her photography she wants to convey the importance of human dignity, love for one's neighbor and justice for all. She said she thanks God for the gift of photography and hopes that her photos inspire people to do good. Ms. Kare was also the photographer at the event.



Mrs. Päivi Yoshizumi, the president of WFP Finland gave a talk on the topic Women as Peacemakers using education material Leadership of Heart curriculum created by the WFP US. On the cover slide "the leader within" suggests discovering the leader within oneself; who am I, what is my uniqueness? What are the choices in my life? How to find my calling? The founder of WFP Dr Hak Ja Han Moon, Mother Moon, has said: "History is calling for reconciliation, compassion, love, service, and sacrifice.

Today's problems cannot be solved by the logic of power...Our present problems can only be solved by the logic of love." Ms. Yoshizumi shared from Valorie Burton's self-help book Successful women think differently: "Deeper joy comes from peace and love and knowing you are living the life you were meant to live also, making a difference in the lives of others".

Carmen Freire from Norway shared how she is supporting immigrant women through teaching new technology and through pod casts and website. She talked about her website Free from shame where she tries to offer solutions to problems like issues raising children, e.g. how to set boundaries to teenage boys when living in different kind of culture from one's own.



Margoth Tove Kalstad, the president of WFP Norway, also a therapist talked on important issue, how to heal from trauma, pointing out that women suffer so much in this world. She introduced a way to understand trauma, seven stages of trauma. Starting from balance of self, homeostasis, experiencing trauma, then several steps, unto finally finding oneself to have insight how to move on, as a wiser person. Ms. Kalstad reminded the audience that healing from trauma is not a simple, easy process. We need compassion towards a traumatized person we encounter or for myself if I am going through trauma. Compassion and love, instead of trying to fix someone, are healing energies for trauma.

The presentations could provide insight and understanding. There was also time to share in small groups of six issues that came up in the presentations. Discussions continued lively during lunch and coffee break.

There was a beautiful treasure given to all by music performances. Bláthnaid Conroy Murphy, a choral student at Sibelius Academy, singer and pianist sang two Irish songs, She moved through the fair and May the road rise. The last one was familiar to many also the words were shared on the screen, so it ended up being a nice uplifting unison in three languages, Finnish, English and Swedish. Ms. Joselyne Mabele sang song Let there be Peace on Earth, La paix sur la terre in French. Both performances truly uplifted the participants.

As a final program we held a Bridge of Peace ceremony, trademark of WFP. Originally the ceremony was for women from hostile histories come to meet a person from enemy nation with compassion. We had Finnish women lined up to meet a new friend from neighboring countries. It was such a delight to meet a person somewhat given to you, as participants from these two lines met each other in the front and greeted and hugged each other and shared a card, which each had previously chosen for one's sister of peace to give at this ceremony with a written message. It was amazing how this event felt totally directed from up above, and the new friendships were as they were truly graciously planned.

Also, Backby Manor was a great place to meet each other. It was called Kaisa's home by Kaisa Kallio, the wife of president Kyösti Kallio, who in 1938 used money she received as her 60th birthday gift collected from Finnish people to purchase a place for exhausted women, for rest and healing. So, this venue fitted well for our Nordic event, for women to empower oneself and each other.

Indeed, maybe one of the most important of the conference were encounters and having a chance to connect with women beyond our own country. We can support each other in our effort to bring more peace and greater harmony in this seemingly unstable world.