

UPF and IAFLP Central America and the Caribbean's First Ladies Webinar

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Central America and the Caribbean -- On March 27, 2021, the regional chapter of UPF-Central America and the Caribbean held a webinar of the International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP) on the theme "The Global Role of Women's Contributions to Peace and Development." The conference had 354 attendees from 68 countries and more than 9,700 viewers on Facebook and other social media. To see the conference, [click here](#).

The moderator was Mrs. Gail Adele Veith, secretary general of UPF-Barbados and regional coordinator of IAFLP, who said in welcome, "We will be hearing from seven honorable women today, all of whom lead, multi-task, nurture, heal, inspire, guide and, most of all, love."



Dr. Julia Moon, president, Women's Federation for Peace International, offered opening remarks:

It is always a joy to see efforts that unite and celebrate the hard work of women. whether it be small or monumental. This is what made possible the first IAFLP 2021 event in this region.

Women with their maternal nature are natural peacemakers who can teach their families to be a little kinder towards one another. This is the true essence of peacebuilding that will naturally spill over to our larger communities. We may feel alone at times, but the power we have is undeniable when we come together as we have today.

The loving and sacrificial leadership of women working together to empower our youth in goodness, build cohesive communities with men, and establish models of ethical and balanced leadership has never been more needed to address today's challenges.

Dr. Charles S. Yang (Regional Chair, UPF-Central America and the Caribbean) pointed out that the United Nations recognizes the importance of mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue as an essential dimension of a culture of peace and established the first week of February as "World Interfaith Harmony Week" and continued to say,

Under the direction of Reverend and Mrs. Moon, UPF conducted the Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) in Israel over a 10-year period. MEPI promoted and strengthened peace between the three religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam: all descendants of the same father, Abraham.

The message of sustainable development through interfaith harmony is crucial at this most important time that we are now living in. I welcome and thank our panelists for sharing their ideas with us, and balanced leadership has never been more needed to address today's challenges.



H.E. Mrs. Sybilene Patricia Minnis, First Lady, Bahamas, commented:

As women leaders, we must continue to dialogue with legislators and decision makers to induce change, eliminate inequality, alleviate hardship, resolve conflict, and ultimately prevent violence and war. Likewise, it is also our duty to develop and implement strategies and subsequently measure outcomes to ensure that persons are positively impacted from the work that we do. Most noteworthy, we must continue to use our voices to "sound the alarm" and speak up and speak out for those whose voices may never be heard. Let us not wait for others to make decisions while women and children around the world continue to be raped, massacred, abducted, and coerced into early marriage as child brides or made to become soldiers well before adolescence.

The early contributions of these first ladies (and others) have ignited a flame that continues to be fueled by first ladies of today. Ladies, we must continue to influence and advocate for unity, equality, rights, and peace in our society and by extension at a global level.

H.E. Mrs. Kim Simplis Barrow, First Lady, Belize (2008–2020), emphasized the following:

Globally, women's peacebuilding potential has not been fully utilized. This is due in large part to their absence or lack of representation from the decision-making processes. That is why I believe that it is important that women are at decision making tables at all levels.

I strongly believe that first ladies have an important role to play as high-level advocates for the strengthening of political will, the mobilization of resources, implementation of policies and programs that make a difference in the lives of people, promote equality, and ultimately create peaceful and secure societies.

H.E. Mrs. Reema Harrysingh Carmona, First Lady, Trinidad and Tobago (2013–2018), pointed out that world leaders need to institutionalize equitable access to opportunities for women in the spheres of business, finance and entrepreneurship to sustain progressive economic development. The UN has stated matter-of-factly, "Women leadership and participation in peace building is a prerequisite for the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." In other words, she concluded, without women's participation, we will not achieve lasting peace; and without the stability of peace, we will not achieve sustainable development.

H.E. Mrs. Patricia Marroquín De Morales, First Lady, Guatemala (2016–2020), stated:

I must also acknowledge and honor the many men who have fought for the respect of women's rights.

So, on the premise that "women and men are equal, in capacities and rights," I ask the: what should women do in the 21st century so that peace and development reach the whole world?

First: Be supportive in all areas of endeavor. Modern women are multi-taskers, mothers, wives,

professionals, providers, and home administrators, and it is necessary that in all the activities we carry out, we are in solidarity, generating study and/or work opportunities for the development of others.

Second: Always ensure peace. Living and teaching a culture of forgiveness and reconciliation is the duty of every human being. We as daughters, wives, mothers, leaders, professionals, politicians, and more, must live and proclaim a culture of forgiveness and reconciliation. Let us teach the previous, the present, and the new generations to forgive.



Third: Let us promote education as a fundamental basis for development. The prophet Hosea said, "My people perish for lack of knowledge" (4: 6). Also, a popular saying goes like this: "He who does not know is like he who does not see."

Mrs. Iroshka Elvir De Nasralla, Co-Founder of the Salvador Party of Honduras, explained:

To build lasting peace we must strengthen the justice system, guarantee respect for human rights, promote opportunities to exercise full freedom of expression, and ensure political participation and access to decision-making where women should be included.

When we talk about the contribution of women towards peace, then we must talk about guaranteeing participation in decision making in all government entities of a country. We should promote public policies that guarantee women's professional development, their psychological and physical integrity, and material resources.

Emphasizing the important points from each one of the panelists, we should together on the role of women in the construction of lasting and sustainable peace.

Mrs. Blessie Dhakal pointed out that today's event has been meaningful and valuable because it offered an opportunity to gather as well as discuss important issues related to the empowerment of women and the direction of the future. She concluded the event by saying, "I am optimistic that the discourse on the role of women does not end here. We are looking forward to providing more women a voice in the decision-making process for peace and development. Let me once again thank you very much. Have a prayerful and peaceful holy week. Namaste!"