

Plenary Discusses Women's Role As Peacebuilders

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Seoul, Korea—Women's role in bringing peace was discussed by prominent women leaders at Plenary Session VI of the 3rd World Summit.

The session, which took place on August 29, 2015, in the InterContinental Grand Seoul Parnas hotel, was organized in cooperation with the Women's Federation for World Peace International, a co-sponsor of World Summit 2015. **Ms. Alexa Ward**, the vice president of WFWP, served as moderator.

Women leaders from various nations offered their thoughts on the role, responsibility and capacities of women to contribute to peace, human flourishing and mutual prosperity for all people. In particular, the significance of the family as an instrument of peace and global prosperity was emphasized.



Professor Yeon Ah Choi, the president of WFWP, spoke about the importance of “creating a peaceful society and environment for the sake of the future happiness for all humankind.” We are in an age when the views of women are being increasingly appreciated and welcomed, particularly with regard to peacebuilding, she said. The founders of UPF proclaimed “The Coming of the Age of Women” in 1992 and invested in numerous programs to educate and support women “to be leaders for a century of true peace and happiness.”

She quoted Dr. Sun Myung Moon on the role of women centering on the family: “Peace must first be realized in the individual and in the family, because these form the basis for all human

organizations and systems.” Professor Choi spoke about the activities of the Women's Federation for World Peace, which promotes the Interfaith Peace Blessing movement and pure love youth education. “Participation by women is needed in all aspects of society, from diplomacy and politics to the economy and legal system reform,” Professor Choi said. “Women need to be active in education and culture, in sports and the arts, not to mention the diverse activities of NGOs.” In closing, she emphasized the need to encourage and foster the practice of living for the sake of others.

Dr. Emilia Alfaro Franco, senator, Paraguay, reported on the status of women in Paraguay, beginning with a historical analysis going back to the days of the Spanish conquistadors who came to the New World in the first half of the sixteenth century; the period after Paraguay declared its independence from Spain in 1811; and in the 20th century. Women have helped to protect and create the nation, Senator Franco said. Women have worked in the fields, the factories, and in all areas of society. Since 1950, the population in Paraguay has quadrupled. The distribution of population by sex is currently balanced, compared to the female predominance characteristic of past decades. Senator Franco spoke about the difference in the number of children born in rural areas and urban areas.

Education is also drastically different depending on where women reside. More than half of the women who work in the urban sector are located in only three occupational categories: self-employed worker (34.8 percent), domestic worker (16.1 percent) and unpaid family worker (6.2 percent). The educational situation of Paraguayan women in general has improved in the last decade, although there are still significant problems, mainly in rural areas. Today women are taking major roles in the country and

supporting the development of democracy. The current minister of defense and the minister of labor are women. The participation of women in the exercise of power and decision-making in the Paraguayan Parliament (2013-2018) is as follows: Chamber of Deputies: (12/80 in total) and the Senate: (9/45 in total).



Ambassador Haruko Hirose, former ambassador to Morocco, Japan, spoke on “Women, the Family and Peace,” from the perspective of a Japanese woman. Ambassador Hirose praised the WFP for “fostering solidarity among women around the world.” In the aftermath of World War II, the Japanese people, particularly women, learned to appreciate the value of peace, she said. Although the world has advanced in terms of economics, health, life expectancy, etc., many nations suffer from the effects of hostilities and other tragedies. Women and children, said the ambassador, are innocent victims. Today in Japan, more women choose to work outside the home, seeking economic independence, but since women’s salaries, on the average, are lower than those of men, they’re more likely to succumb to financial difficulties, which creates implications for child care, education, and housing. Another big problem in Japan is its ageing society. In 2014, the percentage of people over the age of 65 was 25.9 percent of the population, and it is forecast that this will rise to 33.4 percent by 2035. Women over the age of 65 account for 28.7 percent of the total population (2014).

These facts create two major difficulties for women. First, responsibility to care for the elderly is traditionally the role of women. Second, as the life expectancy of women is longer than that of men, women often are left alone, poor and without means of support. Ambassador Hirose referred to her own experience at UNESCO. The preamble to the constitution of UNESCO declares: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.” “Scholars say that young people joining terrorist groups are often desperate to establish a place for themselves in society. So the answer to a secure society lies in providing an environment where people can raise children with abundant love and where young people can live happily without becoming desperate. It is a challenge for us all,” she said. Hence, the importance of securing the role of women and the family, since the mother is instrumental in raising children as well as being the center of the family. “A happy family is the best place for raising children as well as for maintaining social security,” she said. Education is also a key to national development. “We need to bear in mind that we are citizens of the world: We must learn not only to be good citizens of our own country but also to be good citizens of the world. I believe this will help to nurture mutual understanding and build peace, and in that sense the solidarity of women will make a significant change.”

Madam Adi Koila Nailatikau, the first lady of Fiji, recalled the words of the late Dr. Sun Myung Moon, who said: “If we have not achieved peace, it is because people forget its most fundamental aspect. Before we talk about peace among nations, we must settle our peace with God.” She spoke about the importance of the family, where children learn the rules of conduct, including cooperation, truthfulness, love and caring and “where we equip them with their compasses, charts and suitable provisions for their voyage” to be good citizens. Women hold a special place in the family. They are the foundation upon which the nation is built. Without a secure foundation, she said, it eventually will fall. “The last 20 years have seen Fiji remove all vestiges of discrimination against gender from laws and policies, but it is something that is still slowly being enforced in my country and region,” she said. Regarding the situation of climate change in Fiji and the South Pacific, many cynics “claim that the occurrences worldwide are due to natural reactions of Mother Nature and changing times,” but the “hard, cold evidence and harsh reality that our people are faced with” are indisputable to those who live there, particularly after the devastation of

Tropical Cyclone Pam (March 2015), which is regarded as one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the Southern Hemisphere, as well as Cyclone Ian, Cyclone Evan and Cyclone Wilma.

The first lady called on the nations of the world to increase their awareness of the effects of climate change and accept the responsibility to work together and allocate the necessary methods and resources so that all nations can “advance as one world with a common goal.” The fundamentals of all religious faiths state that “some of the oldest and most beautifully written environmental policies and laws given by our Lord Father himself specify that man and the environment should live in harmony and should never take more than can be replenished for the sake of all of God’s creations.” The first lady said we must return to these fundamentals and remind ourselves that peace with God starts from within each and every one of us.

Dr. Rima Salah, member of the U.N. High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, United States, spoke on “Women, the Family and Peace.” The panel, which was created by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in October 2014 to review U.N. Peace Operations, also reviewed issues relating to women and peace and security. In her experience, she said, women are often not represented and consulted in U.N. assessments. “Today a historic 60 million people, mainly women and children, suffer the fate of internal displacement or being refugees abroad. In addition to indiscriminate killings, appalling abuses are perpetrated against civilians in the midst of today’s armed conflict. Sexual violence remains a pervasive tactic of modern war; women and girls are subject to mass abductions, as well as forced conversion, marriage and sexual slavery,” she said. However, there is a “growing body of evidence that participation of women in all aspects of peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding has a tangible impact on human security and on peace and security in general.” Women play an important role as “vocal advocates for preventing conflict before it breaks out. ... Women are on the forefront of campaigns to curb escalating violence and diffuse tension between groups. ... Women bridge political, economic and social divides.” Despite progress in the status of women, “there are still significant implementation gaps that need to be addressed, and the vision of [U.N.] Resolution 1325 [which calls for the adoption of a gender perspective to consider the special needs of women and girls during conflict] remains only partially realized. Dr. Salah called for a shift in the U.N. peace operations to encourage a transformative shift to elevate women in the peace and security agenda.

Mrs. Judith Karp, former deputy attorney general, Israel, and former deputy chair and member of the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child, spoke on “The Gender Perspective of Peacemaking.” She said, “Women around the world share common perspectives that emanate from their experiences as women. Women share sensitivity to injustices and sufferings stemming from the history of injustice toward them as women.” She said that women have an inherent nature that predisposes them to “favor peaceful solutions and peaceful actions.” Mrs. Karp relayed the Bible story about the five daughters of Zelophehad, who, after their father died, petitioned Moses to allow them to receive their father's inheritance since he had no sons to carry on his name. Moses agreed and a precedent was created—the first law of inheritance for women. Mrs. Karp said the underlying reason for this ruling was because “the daughters were united and stood together in their fight.”

She then detailed the accomplishments of recent female Nobel Peace Prize winners, including Malala Yousafzai (Pakistan, 2014), and the three 2011 laureates (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee and Tawakkol Karman). She also referred to U.N. Security Council Resolution No. 1325, “On Women, Peace and Security” (2000), which “focuses on giving women their own voices in peace processes based on universal rights.” The resolution brings out the gender perspective which, according to Mrs. Karp, represents a new approach to peace—a “feminized concept of peace.” Historically men have interpreted peace as the absence of hostilities and war, but women, on the other hand, “interpret peace in terms more sensitive to the need of ensuring personal security as well as familial and communal well-being.” She said, “Peace for women is not just the lack of war but also an ongoing process of building, development and infrastructure necessary for sustainable peace.” Women “tend to look at society as a family.”

