

Forum on Planet 50-50 by 2030: STEP IT UP For Gender Equality

Barbara Moseley-Marks
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Fairfax, VA – Throughout the Christian world, “Good Friday” is observed as a solemn reminder of the supreme sacrifice Christ made for the freedom of mankind. Yet, juxtaposed to this is the reality of the harsh conditions under which the majority of the women of South Asia and other parts of the world exist. To learn more about these UPF Virginia in partnership with Pure Style, Inc. hosted on forum on “Planet 50-50 by 2030: STEP IT UP For Gender Equality” at the Learning Center from 6:30 – 8:30 PM.



Some of these atrocities were explained by Ambassador For Peace (AFP) Mrs. Fawzia Etemadi, who recalled the drastic changes in Afghanistan when Russia invaded. Hundreds of people were buried alive including many members of her own family. The perpetrators said bullets were too valuable to waste on the people so they buried them alive. The ground moved continuously because the people were still alive. When she left Afghanistan en route to Germany she was traveling with her infant child and baby. Except for the clothes they wore the authorities stripped them of all their personal possessions at the airport. One of the airport officials grudgingly tossed a blanket at her. What should have been a short stay in Germany, to await her husband’s arrival, lasted for several months. When she recalled what her countrymen did to their own people she could not understand why she and others, having committed no crime, had to suffer in this way. As a result she had a nervous breakdown. When they arrived in America she was so relieved she immediately decided that America is her country. She will no longer hold on to the pain of the past. She will move on in freedom.

Mrs. Etemadi has held various positions at different governmental and non-governmental organizations with the US Department of State, US Department of Justice, US Department of Homeland Security, US House of Representatives, Ambassador for Peace, Founding Member and Executive Director of the Afghanistan Foundation; Afghan-American Electoral College Member, and Provisional President of the Rotary International 1985-Present.



In another presentation, AFP Mrs. Man Kumari Thapa, showed the geographical location and the countries that comprise South Asia. She then provided statistics to show the discrepancy between literate and the illiterate women in Nepal, her native land, as well as the other countries in South Asia. The caste system is an impediment to the country because, *“the women in the upper classes do nothing to help the majority of women because they are in the lower class”* she said.

“Step It Up for Gender Equality” is a good idea, however practical systems need to be implemented, she encouraged. One vital step is educating young girls beginning from the lower grades. This will enable them to become catalysts for change in their own families when their mothers are being mistreated by their fathers. Neelab Yousefzai, from Afghanistan, who received her AFP appointment during the program, added that the mothers also should be educated because the changes in the school will have the support of the mothers at home. Mariam Rusta and Malal Nezam, also from Afghanistan, and also new AFPs, offered an example of the cycle of violence toward these women. Not only are the women in lower classes kept illiterate but large dowries are required for their wedding. After the wedding they are then sent to live with their in-laws where they become the servant to the family. When the husband returns home after work, even though he may have no intention of harming his wife, his mother instigates domestic violence by saying the wife is no good and is lazy. Unfortunately, this repeats the cycle which she, his mother, experienced when she was younger.

Mrs. Thapa reiterated that education should be implemented at the middle school level which would teach the girls their value. She concluded by saying that the boys should also be educated, thereby preventing the continuation of the cycle of violence perpetuated by their predecessors.

Soppi, a princess from Cameroon and a broadcast journalist of AMA TV-USA commented that there are places in Africa where women suffer the same fate and reminded us that women in America also suffer domestic violence.

A call to action was issued by the Executive Director Barbara Moseley-Marks to which everyone agreed. A meeting of AFPs will be convened at a later date for this purpose.

A special thank you to Mr. Yoshiyuki Iwaki of the Sekai Nippo for donating his time to Photograph the event.