

WFWP Ireland - Women of Faith Conference in Dublin

Doris McCann
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The Sisters of Faith for Peace in cooperation with WFWP Ireland and other communities hosted an evening conference entitled 'Women of Faith - Channels of Peace and Dialogue' that was formally opened by Ireland's First Lady Sabina Higgins. It took place on Monday, 28 Nov 2016 in the Mansion House in Dublin, with kind permission of the Lord Mayor. Sabina Higgins is an honorary member of the Sisters of Faith for Peace and a great supporter of our interfaith work here in Ireland.

She spoke passionately about the UN Development Goals as well as women's issues like FGM and violence against women. Then, the Chairwoman Doris McCann welcomed and addressed the audience. She addressed the issue that today's day and age seems to be alarmingly marked by fear, prejudice and stereotypes. She urged us to honor our connection as part of the human family, by connecting beyond the boundaries of our cultural and faith beliefs and making effort to form friendships, and engaging with people beyond our usual comfort zone.

In order to address the complex and legitimate problems in the world properly, we need to create a foundation of trust, knowledge and respect. Prejudice and fear of each other cannot exist in an environment of friendship! With this event, we explored different approaches to peace building by having a representative speaker from each of the three Abrahamic faith communities. The speakers were Sr. Denise Boyle, Zara Faris and Laura Marks OBE. Sr. Denise Boyle, our Christian contributor, spoke based on her rich experience working in justice and development programs, incl. with the United Nations Human Rights Council in both Geneva and New York. Zara Faris, our Muslim contributor, is a researcher

and internationally renowned speaker with a particular interest in the subjects of interfaith, women in Islam, justice for women and men, feminism, reformation and revival and Muslims in the West.



Laura Marks, the Jewish contributor, is the founder of Mitzvah Day, an interfaith social action initiative which is now active in 20 countries involving 40,000 volunteers annually. She also launched Nisa-Nashim last year, a Jewish/Muslim women's network. We had a wonderful MC from the Muslim background, and our Jewish moderator commented beautifully on the contributions. After the presentations, there was time for Q&A with the audience, and it was interesting that most of the questions and comments revolved around our shared concern for protection of women, children and the family. After the formal part of the conference, we mingled and shared over refreshments which included halal and kosher options.

One thing that we were all very proud of and moved by most was that this event was made possible through the genuine collaboration of the different faith and other communities. It was a real team effort that engaged them all and in this way became the living proof of our message. The contributors were: Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland ICCI Clonskeagh The Jewish Representative Council of Ireland Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary Muslim Association of Ireland MAI Women4Women DLR of Southside Partnership Our moderator Judy closed the event very fittingly with the beautiful words of a traditional Jewish Hanukkah song: 'We Have Come to Chase Away the Darkness In our hands are light and fire. Each of us alone is a small light, But together we are a powerful brightness. Leave, darkness! Away with you, blackness! Run away from the light!'

Reported by Doris McCann
WFWP Ireland President