

WFWP USA: Watch UPS's Launching of the IAFLP in the Americas

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***Background:** The International Leadership Conference (ILC), consisting of virtual seminars held in multiple time zones around the world, was hosted by Universal Peace Federation (UPF) from September 11-13, 2020, in commemoration of UPF's 15th Anniversary. The ILC featured each of the seven pillar associations of UPF, to expand discourse over theme, "Opportunity and Hope at a Time of Global Crisis: Interdependence, Mutual Prosperity and Universal Values." As a partner of UPF, Women's Federation for World Peace, International (WFWP) co-sponsored the pillar International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP) sessions within the ILC.*

At this crucial time in history, as the world struggles to manage the devastating and multifaceted consequences of the Covid-19 outbreak, it is difficult to find hope. Countries are left to juggle the large-scale economic and institutional implications, while individuals experience sickness, loss of connectivity, work, freedoms, and emotional stability.

In search of innovative solutions, the International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP) shines light toward the profound, yet widely underutilized perspective of women. Looking beyond the mentality of self-sustaining survival through power, this perspective stems from the maternal, compassionate, and harmonizing instincts of service and love. Unlocking this potential may serve to not only assist during the pandemic recovery process, but to allow humanity to flourish in unprecedented ways.

Convening at this important time, the International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP) presented the fifth virtual session of the International Leadership Conference (ILC) across the North, Central, and South Americas, on September 12, 2020, at 10 AM EDT. Prominent panelists, including former First Ladies and women leaders in government and civil society, addressed the **theme "Women's Leadership in Times of Global Crisis."** **The live program was attended by over 800 throughout 38 countries.**

Moderator **Dr. Susan Taffer**, Founder of World Connections Foundation, facilitated the program with precision and grace. As Chair of the session and Regional Coordinator for IAFLP in North America, **Mrs. Angelika Selle** warmly welcomed the distinguished panelists and attendees to the very first gathering of IAFLP among the Americas, and convened the program over prayer. She expanded on the founding vision of the association, which seeks to connect women leaders from all backgrounds together with first ladies, to resolve today's challenges.

Depicting the importance of the gathering, **Dr. Sun Jin Moon**, International Senior Vice President of the Women's Federation for World Peace, gave noteworthy opening remarks. Recalling lessons from both of her parents, life-long visionaries and peace leaders driven by the will of God, she quoted her Father, Rev. Sun Myung Moon who declared, **"The coming world will be one of reconciliation and peace based on women's maternal character, love, and sociability. The time is coming when the power of women will save the world."** At this time of crisis, despair, and marginalization, Dr. Moon continues to find

hope in gatherings such as this, utilizing the collaborative, maternal perspective and leadership of women for the benefit of humanity and the world. In closing, Dr. Moon encouraged first ladies and first gentlemen to become their nation's greatest role models, who operate from a parental standpoint, to bring citizens together as part of a peaceful, global family.



Mdm. Hilda Patricia Morroquin de Morales, the First Lady of Guatemala from 2016-2020, artistically depicted an analogy between the Covid-19 crisis and the phrase "the calm after the storm." While we may be feeling threatened by the current situation, after the fact we may find ourselves, in some ways, better off than we had been before. If we are able to reflect on the fragility and therefore importance of human life, learn to find strength in community to form collective solutions, and educate our children as citizens rooted in universal values, we will be better equipped to face inevitable challenges for years to come.

Hon. Mdm. María Fernanda Flores de Alemán, First Lady of Nicaragua from 1997-2002 and current Member of Congress, drew from her country's hardships to encourage necessary and forward moving action. In Nicaragua, where official safety measures amidst Covid-19 were brushed aside, families banded together to follow the recommendations of the World Health Organization. Also, accounts of femicide (extreme violence and killing of women) have increased alongside heightened life pressures, with growing numbers of women not receiving justice. As activists, she urged us to unite together, reassess our priorities, and continue to advocate until they come to fruition.

Hon. Mdm. Emilia Alfaro de Franco, First Lady of Paraguay from 2012-2013 and Senator of Paraguay from 2013-2018, conveyed how the pandemic has allowed us to more clearly see the disproportionate challenges women face amidst times of crisis, providing further visibility to the causes of women. This visibility affords the opportunity to strengthen public policies, and to reverse known inequalities and gender based violence. In addition, backed by studies on the role of women during the pandemic, the leadership of women holds a fundamental role in the rebuilding of society. So not only are women hit hardest by the pandemic, but are a key asset in the recovery process, furthering our resolve to improve conditions for, and increase representation of women.

Through her presentation, **Hon. Margaret R. Best**, Member of Parliament in Ontario, Canada from 2007-2013, explored the resilient, courageous, and compassionate nature of women in times of distress. Navigating between examples of historic trailblazers, current women in government championing the battle of Covid-19, and personal experiences during this time, she encouraged each of us to become leaders who step outside our comfort zones to make a difference in someone's life.

Dr. Samia Burton, former Vice President of the Congressional Club in Washington, DC and Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine at The George Washington University, acknowledged not only the national and international challenges we are facing, but the pandemic affecting families behind closed doors. Heightened anxiety and restrictions of stay at home orders have led to increases in substance abuse, suicide attempts, and domestic violence, all while limiting the ability for people to seek help. The silver lining in all of this is how it has brought humanity together. She encouraged us to follow the steps of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, who spreads the message of hope while devoting her energy to creating a better environment for the future.

The question and answer portion further addressed the role of women in politics and implementing change, alongside ways we can move IAFLP forward concluding this conference. Dr. Taffer closed the event reminding us to go forth with new hope, new vision, and a renewed sense of purpose.