

WFWP USA: Accomplishing the UN Dream: Starting with my own Village

Merly Barlaan
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WFWP USA would like to share the success and story of Mrs. Merly Barlaan. During the International WFWPI assembly on March 4 and 5, she was awarded the Humanitarian Award by the Association of Christian Evangelists, New Jersey, USA. This award was for her collaborative effort to gather and send supplies to the Philippines after a category five hurricane hit the country last December 16, 2021.

This award was one of many. Merly has been active in peace work with WFWP for the last 26 years! She is currently the International Vice President and CAO Deputy Director for WFWP's Office for UN Relations. She worked for the WFWP UN office for 14 years before moving back to her home country of the Philippines and invested in her community as the WFWP Philippines President for seven years, before coming back to the UN office in 2020.

Mrs. Merly was gracious to sit for an interview about her journey as a peace advocate:

Why did you leave the UN after 14 years to move back to your homeland?

Once a week I attended UN briefings as the administrative assistant of WFWPI at the UN. The goals of the UN are peace and development. However, when I would visit my hometown, I felt the discussion we were having at the UN were not reaching down to benefit the people in the village. The UN was doing good work, but still something was missing.

My goal was to figure out a formula that would work in my small village to accomplish the UN dream - to build a prosperous, sustainable community from the ground up.

In 2012, I quit my job at the UN and moved back to my hometown.

What did you do first when you arrived at your hometown?

First, I took three years dedicated to understanding the community. Why is it not prospering? I was forming a holistic plan: education, service to the community, livelihood programs, and a plan to build a mini city with health centers, schools and shopping.

I found that the biggest problem was not lack of ideas or talent but something lacking in leadership. In the Philippines, corruption is rampant and part of the culture from the home to the senate. Leaders start out with good intentions but when they encounter conflicts they don't know how to resolve them. Whether

they are brilliant leaders or inexperienced leaders, they don't know how to resolve conflict from the point of view of working together.

I began by educating the mothers. Empowering the mothers. I became the WFWP President of the Philippines and I initiated the "Mothers' Hearts Network" which is a grassroots-based, impact-driven project, designed as a national campaign to provide vision, educate, inspire, and empower women to practice their role as mothers and nation-builders.

What other programs/activities did you organize while in the Philippines?

Below is a list of some of the major initiatives I have worked on during my time in the Philippines and continue to develop:

1. The "10,000 Heroes League" - a holistic leadership training program for the youth, geared towards inspiring them to become peace-loving global citizens transcending the barriers of poverty while raising them to become honorable future leaders and incorruptible stewards of the nation.
2. The "Service for Philippines: Culture of Heart Encounter" - is an annual experiential, impact-driven international community service project for global youth leaders from various nations and cultures to promote world peace through understanding and appreciation of peoples and cultures through cooperation and partnership while helping a community in need.
3. The Mister and Miss Pure Love - Leadership and Beauty Pageant that aims to cut down the high rate of teen-age pregnancy and stop the spread of HIV-AIDS in Philippines while inspiring the Filipino youth to become trailblazers in creating a culture of Purity, filial piety, and patriotism.
4. HTM Development Framework: Creating Heavenly Hometown, One Family at A Time - A 10-year holistic community development framework to empower families in unlocking the power of love and happiness to its fullest potentials. The program is implemented in step-by-step, family-centered, faith-based partnership with local government units through education, coaching, and engaging the families and community as builders and stewards of a heavenly nation.
5. Project HOPE: Permaculture Peace Garden - Permaculture is a holistic and regenerative approach to land management that adopts arrangements observed in flourishing natural ecosystems. It aims to establish income-generating food forests managed collaboratively by young people and their families to address food insecurity, environmental degradation, while cutting down the social cost of migration and providing human resources capacity building.

How and why did you return to the UN?

In the beginning of 2020, I attended a UN event and when everything was shut down due to covid, I could not return home. There was a job opening at the WFWPI headquarters for the deputy director and I applied for the position.

What are the goals now that you are back at the UN office?

At the UN we have three major goals:

1. Women raising Peace Leaders

2. Women leadership to be peacemakers in a holistic way
3. The Environment

We also have a goal to establish a network of 430 peace leaders at the UN and in the world community by 2027.

What advice would you give to the young leaders starting out in this type of work?

Our value comes from God. When we know our value we can be confident. Where you keep a beautiful and clear heart you will achieve your dreams. Because this heart will manifest, it will create that future for you.

When I started, I didn't think I was smart enough to do this kind of work. This advice from my mentor to keep my sincere and beautiful heart gave me so much confidence. With this mindset there was no confusion in me so my creativity could open up. When we are creative, we can be productive and we can influence the world in a positive way. There is no other way to heal the world.

I would like to share a quote from WFWP's founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon: "Life is like running a marathon without knowing when it will end. A truly successful life is not powered by money, position or authority. It is powered by true love."

What is the source of your inspiration?

I am inspired by the WFWP Co-founders Rev Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon. They have lived their whole lives working to make the world a better place. I am determined to do my part in bringing about the world God intended at the beginning of creation.

What are your current plans for the Philippines now that you are back at the UN?

We have a network of families and leaders. There is already a system, structure and people in place. My biggest project is training young environmentalists in permaculture. We are documenting each step to show to the United Nations as a blueprint for sustainable development.

I realized as a leader, being involved and grounded in the grassroots, at the community level is what makes the work I do at the UN more effective. I know, I could not do the work I do any other way.

Merely is active on YouTube. Below are links to some of her videos. You can email her personally at m.barlaan@wfwp.org

She produced inspirational short videos called, "[Inspiration Hub: Live Your Dream Series](#)". At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, she co-authored and co-hosted a series of 24-episode weekly online shows entitled, [WOMEN'S WORLD](#). In April of 2022, she produced a sequel to Women's World entitled, [MERLY'S WORLD](#) - a personal journey to reconnecting with nature while healing the planet through permaculture.