

Centennial International Women's Day 2011

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March 24, 2011



On 8th March the world celebrated the 100th International Women's Day and on the 9th the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP)-UK and the Universal Peace Federation (UPF)-UK jointly hosted an event to mark this auspicious day in the House of Lords. Speeches were given by various luminaries including Lords and Baronesses to a packed house with many people having to stand. Two of the speakers, Lady Fiona Hodgson and Baroness Sandip Verma, had recently attended the annual Commission on the Status of Women and the inauguration of the United Nation's Women in New York. They were able to draw on those international developments in their speeches.



Lord King gave the opening speech, welcoming everyone. He set the tone of the rest of the event by highlighting the plight of women the world over with facts and figures like 66% of all work is done by women and yet they only receive 10% of all income! A third of women suffer from physical and sexual violence. 19 million women have lost jobs in the latest economic crises. And women make up only 19% of membership in the English Parliament.

Next Margaret Ali, Director of UPF and advisor to WFWP-UK spoke on the theme of the value and nature of women. She began by informing us of a shocking fact that in Uzbekistan men can divorce women as quickly and easily as a simple text. The women have no rights to their home and must vacate their home! Not surprisingly we learnt that it's a patriarch society where there is a huge discrepancy in pay and opportunity between the men and women. Margret explained that women are treated with such contempt in many parts of the

world because there is very little or no respect for feminine values such as love and compassion. These are the natural qualities of women and are essential in nurturing future generations and in establishing harmony. She pointed out that we don't have to become like men to be their equal which is what extreme feminism is about. Women can enjoy their distinct roles and have equal value to men. We need to find a way to work together with men as we both need each other. Margaret gave an example of how a woman's role in the home is extremely important; In Bangladesh and Kenya, women have proved highly adept at making money go far with micro finance as they have to think of not only their children but also their community and beyond. Margaret ended her speech by stating that women's role is undervalued and underpaid but is the most important.



Lady Fiona Hodgson, President of the National Conservative Party, pointed out that in the 21st century there was no country in the world where women were equal to men. In many countries women represent only 1% of property owners and are still denied the vote. She mentioned that there are 5000 honour killings per year and in Britain alone 2 women a week are killed in domestic violence. 1000 women die in childbirth around the world every day. In conflict areas 75% of casualties are women and children. 'I am glad that our Government has made the commitment that the UK is putting the wellbeing of women and children at the centre of its international aid policy. And one way to help women is, as the title of this event this evening – to give them 'Equal access to education, training and science and technology: Pathway to decent work for women'. If women can become more economically independent they can help themselves.' 'The benefits' she explained 'extend to future generations' and to the wider society. (For Full Speech)

She declared that the solution to improving the lot of women was to give them equal access to education and training and Science and T is the pathway to decent work for women. This is a human right and helping and investing in women is investing in society as a whole. This can only be accomplished with both men and women joining forces.

Belinda Atim spoke about bringing awareness and taking responsibility of women's suffering and spoke about the women in Congo who were being brutalised. She said,

'Our peers have achieved a great deal in fighting for equality which granted women the rights to participate in public spheres including, right to equality, rights to choosing their leaders, they also fought hard to gain an opportunity for women to demand equal representation and to ensure that their interests are fully represented in government. 100 years on, however, I am sad to say, many countries, particularly developing countries are yet to grant and develop principles of true democracy and equality.' (For Full Speech)

Mitty Tohma, President of WFWP-UK, gave a more uplifting slant on women's role in history and the present day "who were working beside men and not behind them." in the home and in public office.

Dr H. Khan also spoke about great female role models in all religions and said that imbalances come from ignorance. She spoke of her experience advising young women as a GP on relationships, sex and life choices.



Mrs Song, the European WFWP Advisor & Co-Chair of European UPF, acknowledged men saying “they don’t realise how beautiful they are in women’s eyes”. She stated that true power of women lies not in her ability to hold public office but in her ability to empathise. This is the logic of love and a result of her having to bear the cross of loss of their sons and husbands in war. Mother Theresa personified the woman’s nature of love and compassion and gave these qualities value and dignity.



Baroness Sandip Verma gave a powerful closing speech. She explained that she had attended the Commission on the Status of Women as the Minister for Equalities in the Lords. She had also seen the launch of United Nations Women under the leadership of Executive Director, Michelle Bachelet. This had merged four organisations promoting women’s equality and empowerment into one body. She declared that men needed to be part of the solution and women needed to be empowered to come into civil society and politics so they could be at the heart of decision making. Unfortunately in UK women only represented 22% in politics

and yet Rwanda had 56%! She ended by saying that when women get to the top “Please do not pull up the ladder as it is very, very lonely up there!”

There was time for some spirited comments from others in the audience including Arsheen Aneja from Art of Living, Adam Nazar from VIP Minds and Tara Love from Girls and Politics. Loline Reed spoke of her experience coming from the Philippines a long time ago and raising children in the UK. Cllr Mimi Harker OBE shared how hard it had been to advance as a woman and as someone from a minority background. Sofia-Chezene Theophilou, CEO of London Family TV explained her role to provide wider activities for families and especially young people. All of the contributors were worthy and passionate advocates for women.