

WFWP Germany marks 25 Years of WFWP 1992-2017!

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“25-Year-Anniversaries are something to celebrate!

In 1992, the Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP) was established, and Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon delivered an inaugural speech in Frankfurt and Berlin. The German Women’s Federation took the opportunity of marking this anniversary by holding a Festival in the Neumühle Seminar Center in Bad Camberg, Germany, on the first weekend of May 2017.

Some of those in attendance had been long associated with the Women’s Federation, while others were less familiar with its work; most had travelled from within Germany, but there was a sizeable and enthusiastic contingent of ‘sisters’ from Austria, and Carolyn Handschin (FFWPU and WFWPI), made the journey from Switzerland.

Elisabeth Heil, the current President of Women’s Federation for Peace, Germany, greeted the audience of about seventy people, and officially opened the festival. Then followed greetings from Jack Corley (President FFWPU Europe), Carolyn Hanshin (WFWP Europe) and Dieter Schmidt, (President, FFWPU Germany). Dieter has always encouraged the German FFWPU to work closely with and support the Women’s Federation, of which his wife is an active member. (And at the end of the weekend, he commented that he had never before participated in a conference where there was such a warm and embracing spirit!)

The program was moderated by two very capable and lively young women - Nicole Thurner and Carmen Rizzi, and between some of the contributions Nicole sang, accompanying herself on the piano.

Rita Seewald was the first president of the Women’s Federation in Germany and has continued to be a faithful support over the years. She gave an overview of the history of the organization in Germany and internationally, stressing just how much the aspect of sisterhood and reconciliation was not only talked about, but acted on. She described making ‘sisters’ in far off lands such as North Korea, China and Israel as well as in Europe, and she very movingly related experiences during ‘Bridge of Peace’ ceremonies where she felt strongly that deep mutually inflicted wounds by previous enemy countries were being healed, above and beyond what was happening during the ceremonies.

After lunch, Ingrid Lindemann competently tackled the challenge of presenting a comprehensive overview of projects and events initiated and sponsored by the German Women’s Federation over the past 25 years.

Some of these projects have gained recognition far beyond Germany, for example the project "Dignity of Women" and the publication "Herz und Hand", (Heart and Hand). This quarterly publication (very much the joint work of Ingrid and Christine Sato) has won many readers both in Germany and internationally (German speaking region in Europe).

The first day of the festival was rounded off by a wonderful evening of cultural entertainment:

One of the guests, a Russian lady now living in Giessen, is a professional singer and delighted the audience with two songs: “The Lark” (or “The Skylark”) by Michail Glinka and “Lips are Silent” (The Merry Widow) by Franz Lehár; Chiyo Stang presented a Japanese dance, inspiring several of the audience to join her on the stage and Nicole sang as she played the piano. But surely the highlight of the evening was the performance of the ‘Angels of Peace’ children’s dance group from Moscow. Their founder and coach, Olga Vakulinskaya, had long desired to have the children perform internationally, and now the dream had been fulfilled! The group of 13 girls and 3 boys truly won the hearts of the audience with their repertoire of Russian dances and songs, performed in eye-catching and varied costumes. The songs especially conveyed the longing, nostalgic and melancholic soul of the Russian people. And the two final songs sung in German especially touched the audience!



The Bridge of Peace ceremony has become a hallmark of the WFWP events, and Dr. Maria Riehl from Austria explained the procedure and significance of this ‘sisterhood ceremony.’ Because of time restrictions only a few representative women crossed the symbolic “bridge” on this occasion. Those who felt called to participate were mainly German or Russian women, and tears were shed as those from former enemy countries embraced in reconciliation.

The official program ended by the presentation of gifts and certificates of recognition and several women felt spontaneously moved to take the floor

Sunday morning started reflectively with a meditation to the tones of a Chinese gong followed by a short film about the cooperation of Israeli and Palestine women. Then two highly interesting and informative presentations were delivered by our younger representatives - Natascha Schellen (about women in Lebanon) and Nicole Thurner (about the UN-Millennium and Sustainable Development Goals).

The enthusiasm and competence of these young women give great hope for the future of WFWP!. It is well assured and in good hands!

"World Café" is an increasingly popular vehicle for exchange of ideas and discussion, and the topics chosen for this program point were:

- the value of women in society,
- experience and ideas about womens’ way of conflict-resolution, and
- cooperation with other groups.

The ensuing discussions were lively and constructive and results and suggestions were written down and pinned to a board to be consolidated.

The kitchen staff had provided excellent meals and the final lunch of Korean food was especially appreciated by all.

This festival afforded an opportunity to renew old friendships and make new contacts and friends; to discover new sources of strength and inspiration encouraging advancement beyond the comfort zone.”

Reported by Catriona Valenta
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