

UPF International: Web Conference: The Leadership of Women in Times of Crisis

Aidan Walsh
June 19, 2020



United States -- On June 19, 2020, UPF International held a web conference titled "The Leadership of Women in Times of Crisis." The conference had 530 attendees from 77 countries.

Dr. Thomas Walsh (Chair, UPF International) gave the opening remarks. He pointed out that the International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP) is a flagship program of UPF, linked to the International Summit Council for Peace, and coordinated in partnership with the WFWP International without whose involvement this webinar would not have been possible.

The COVID 19 crisis has had enormous impact on our world, he noted, and has given rise to a wide range of political, economic, and social challenges. As leaders in all fields, women contribute to building stable, peaceful, and productive societies. First Ladies, he said, have a unique vantage point and set of experiences that are of immense value as we search for solutions to the current crisis and prepare to avert ones in the future. In this webinar four First Ladies offer their wisdom and insights on best practices that are bringing solutions during times of crisis.



Panelists

Mrs. Carolyn Handschin-Moser (Vice President, NGO Committee on the Status of Women, UN Geneva) served as the moderator for the panel and introduced the panelists.

Dr. Julia H. Moon (President, Women's Federation for World Peace, International) read a statement from First Lady Debbie Remengesau (First Lady, Palau), who could not appear on the webinar. She congratulated UPF for its steadfast leadership in the face of recent global challenges. Palau and eight other island nations have remained free of Covid-19 due to comprehensive and decisive efforts. Nevertheless, the economic consequences of the pandemic have been severe. Covid-19, she said, is one example of the fact that the health of the planet inexorably affects the health of everyone. The first lady concluded by calling for us to remember other threats to the health of the planet, such as ocean pollution and climate change.

Dame Patience Jonathan (Former First Lady, Nigeria) observed that although the rates of Covid-19 have fallen in Europe, Asia, and North America, there is still concern about its potential future effect on Africa. Dame Jonathan reported on the various efforts her NGO is taking to reduce the health, social and economic impacts of the crisis on the African continent.

Hon. Emilia Patricia Alfaro de Franco (Former First Lady and Current Senator, Paraguay) began by explaining that in the Triple Alliance War in the nineteenth century, Paraguay lost a huge proportion of its population, including most of its men, which left the women behind to rebuild the country. Paraguay, with a population of almost seven million, has avoided the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic, so far having experienced only 13 deaths. Crisis situations like the aftermath of the Triple Alliance War as well as this present situation tend to upend the social order and demand labor and leadership from women. Hon. de Franco called for women the world over to rise to these demands and for men to be willing to accept their leadership.

Hon. Nayla Moawad (Former First Lady, Former Minister of Social Affairs, Lebanon) followed. Hon. Moawad was First Lady of Lebanon for only 17 days, at which time her husband was assassinated. During and after her tenure, she undertook particular initiatives in the areas of human development and education. Her efforts introduced new rights for women as well as expanded education for children and an end to child labor. She called for leaders to develop empathy and to listen to all of their people.

Mrs. Fionnuala Kenny (Wife of former Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny) was the last of the speakers. The crisis has highlighted that we are all sharing this planet, she said, and what is in the interest of one nation is in the interest of all nations. The countries that moved quickly in the crisis have had much better results than those that were indecisive, she reminded the audience. Mrs. Kenney highlighted the new sense of global responsibility in the face of the crisis. People have adapted to the new situation, working from home, social distancing and wearing face masks; businesses have voluntarily shifted production to sanitizers, PPE and other necessities for the pandemic. Mrs. Kenney called for better planning and preparation for the next pandemic. She concluded that we must learn to work together in a more open and honest way.



QandA and closing statements followed:

Hon. de Franco reiterated the need to oppose government corruption in order to ensure efficiency and legitimacy during crises, and she encouraged the creation of a global network of women. Mrs. Kenny said that it is important for governments to support shelters for people escaping domestic violence. Hon. Moawad called for international cooperation on issues affecting women, children, and the environment. Dame Jonathan thanked the panelists and UPF, and Dr. Moon asked for the world to embrace a healthy and green recovery.