

Silence to Leadership: WFWPI Holds 2 Forums on Domestic Violence Prevention

Marivir Montebon
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Barlaan introduces WFWPI programs to the participants of the Newark forum



Speakers and organizers (l-r): Lorena Ramos, executive director of Hope and Esperanza Community Health Center Nuris Rodriguez, Dr. Marivir Montebon, Dr. Hector J. Castro, Newark Councilman and former Mayor Luis , Merly Barlaan, Priscilla Garces, Maria Garces, and Dr. Elaine Duval.



Newly appointed Ambassadors for Peace, Nichole Acevedo, manager of the York Women Center for Justice (left) and YC new graduate Frances Gabriel Waga with WFWPI UN Relations Director Merly Barlaan.

UN representatives of WFWPI successfully launched local activities that opened conversations on domestic violence for the UN campaign on 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence in Newark, NJ and Jamaica, NY.

From silence to leadership, the UN representatives shared their inspiring narratives of domestic abuse to healing and empowerment and leadership in December.

The Hope and Esperanza Community Health Center in Newark became a safe space for sharing stories on December 3 by WFWPI representatives Priscilla Garces, Dr. Elaine Duval, artist Lorena Ramos and Dr. Hector J. Castro.

At the York College in Jamaica, Queens, UN representatives Dr. Remi Alapo, Dr. Marivir Montebon, and Dr. Duval spoke on their own experiences on domestic and digital violence.

The speakers noted that it took time for them to break the stigma of victimhood to gather themselves and seek help and liberate themselves from pain. Once overcome, victims of domestic violence usually become transformative leaders.

The Newark forum was organized by the mother-daughter tandem Maria and Priscilla Garces while Dr. Alapo organized the student forum at York College.

"Get help whenever you can. Call the police, or a pastor, to preserve yourself and your sanity," interfaith Rev. Dr. Elaine Duval said. She is a retired English professor who has become an interfaith minister after her personal challenges.



Visual artist and Global Peace Ambassador Lorena Ramos at the forum "These Hands Don't Hurt."

Garces shared her story of abuse by a college roommate and noted the necessity of calling for help to stop harm. "I reported the bullying and abuse I experienced to our student affairs and my mother. I spoke for yourself," she said. Garces, who became legally blind as an infant, is a disability rights advocate and a UN Representative for WFWPI-DGC.

Artist Lorena Ramos, a newly appointed Ambassador for Peace of WFWPI held back tears while sharing her near-death experiences in the hands of her abuser. Like Duval, she had to escape from home, struggled, and eventually shone in her chosen path in life as an entrepreneur and visual artist. Ramos said that creativity through painting has been her strategy for healing.

Dr. Hector J. Castro, a medical doctor at the Hope and Esperanza Community Center, said

that cultural structures have perpetuated and normalized gender-based violence at the onset of colonial patriarchal societies. It was only in post-modern times that women, in sporadic global initiatives, pushed to be allowed to get an education, go out and vote, get a job, or run their own businesses.



Duval: Love is an antidote to trauma.

Castro, admitted having seen his own father abuse his mother, had to go above his own trauma and become a better person. "We need to understand where violence has begun, so that we, personally and as a community, could stop it," he remarked.



Speakers at the York College CUNY (l-r): Dr. Remi Alapo, Merly Barlaan, Dr. Marivir Montebon, and Dr. Elaine Duval.

Twenty-five students attended the York College forum which was in partnership with the York Women Center for Justice and the York History, Sociology, and Anthropology Department that culminated on

December 10 in celebration of the International Human Rights Day.

Duval also spoke during the forum and elaborated on love as an antidote to trauma. "It's the self-love and self-preservation that will prod you to escape from your abuser. That takes time. Healing begins when you forgive and move on with your life and begin to help others," she said.

A student of Alapo, Joah Joseph, tearfully remarked about her gratitude to the support she received from her teachers and the Women's Justice Center as she hurdled personal and academic challenges.

WFWPI UN Relations director Merly Barlaan said that WFWPI is actively engaged in the campaign to share inspiring narratives for those who need to get out from their own oppression. WFWPI's character education program focuses on peacebuilding in the family, emphasizing that love and respect start from oneself and at home.