

“No Peace without Women” and “No More War - Can We?”

Organized by the Women’s Federation for World Peace International (WFWPI) and the Universal Peace Federation (UPF)

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The conference “No Peace without Women: No More War - Can We?”, was co-organized by the Women’s Federation for World Peace International (WFWPI) and the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) as two distinguished panels of UN officials, government representatives, journalists, and civil society leaders highlighting the indispensable role of women and faith-based actors in peacebuilding and the prevention of war. Other partners were UN Women, NGO Committee on the Status of Women Geneva, World Council of Churches, Global 100 Women, International Association of First Ladies for Peace, Soroptimist International, International Association of Youth and Students for Peace, LDS Charities, and the Geneva Interfaith Intercultural Alliance.

Session I – No Peace without Women



Ms. Carolyn Handschin, Director of the Office for United Nations Relations Geneva at WFWPI, opened the session by explaining how recent regional conflicts led to the formation of a network of women leaders under the “No Peace without Women” banner, uniting for global solidarity and shared responsibility to end war. WFWPI, the IAFLP, and UN and government partners launched conferences across Europe and the Balkans, inspiring similar initiatives elsewhere. This conference marks the second time the movement returns to the United Nations in Geneva. Ms. Handschin stressed that everyone has a unique contribution to make, highlighting the need to “create a vision and standard for peace that starts within the family,” and drawing attention to the vital, often undervalued, role of mothers. She emphasised that “No peace without women” is not exclusive of men, but a call to prioritise and empower girls and women to understand and be supported in their responsibility for community building, reconciliation and restoring global order.

Ms. Kate Forbes, representing the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), highlighted the humanitarian dimension of peace. She reminded participants that climate change and armed conflict are increasingly interlinked and that women and children bear the heaviest burdens. “Peace is about dignity,” she said, “about ensuring that families can build their lives without fear.” Forbes also noted that the majority of Red Cross volunteers worldwide are

women, embodying the principle that peace “is not a document, but an act of service - people standing side by side.”

Ms. Asya Varbanova, Head of the Humanitarian Section at UN Women, presented alarming data on the persistent exclusion of women from peace processes. In 2023, women made up only 9.6% of negotiators, 13.7% of mediators, and 26.6% of signatories to peace agreements. Only a quarter of peace accords even mentioned gender, and none included women’s groups as signatories. She noted a doubling in the number of women killed in conflicts and a 50% rise in cases of conflict-related sexual violence. “We have the evidence, we have the frameworks, but what we lack is political will,” she stated, calling for increased funding for women’s local peace organizations and full implementation of UNSCR 1325.

Ms. Giulia Clara Kessous, UNESCO Artist for Peace, offered a profound reflection on the art of negotiation. “Women negotiate differently,” she said, “not to win, but to ensure shared survival.” She called for a paradigm shift toward “a diplomacy of collaboration,” proposing a 40% quota for women in formal peace processes. Citing economic data, she observed that the cost of war now exceeds 19 trillion USD annually, or 13% of global GDP, making peace “not only a moral imperative but an economic necessity.” Her call to “choose life over victory” resonated deeply with the audience.

From a journalistic perspective, Ms. Olivia Le Poidevin of Reuters offered firsthand testimony from conflict zones, including Ukraine, Gaza, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. She recounted her experience reporting from hospitals in Lebanon after the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023, quoting doctors who told her, “The longer the war goes on, the more women we will have to treat.” Ms. Le Poidevin highlighted that women often bear invisible burdens as widows, heads of households, and survivors of sexual violence. Yet, she emphasized, and she witnessed that “even in the darkest moments, women do not give up - they continue to heal, rebuild, and lead.”

Ms. Patricia Elias, Intergovernmental Advocacy Director at G100 Women, closed the first session by reminding participants that gender equality is not peripheral to peace - it is its foundation. Referring to ongoing women-led peace initiatives in Libya, she called for women’s equal participation in decision-making at all levels, urging the international community to “act for peace now” and ensure that “we do not fail women again.” We are calling for a network, joining hands globally around this call for No Peace without Women.

Global Call to Action for Partnership for No Peace without Women/ No More War:

All speakers rose to voice agreement

Session Closing with **Ms. Anna TORRES**, **Ms. Guila KESSOUS**: Singing in their public debut, “**Mothers of the Earth**”, Grammy 2026 submission



Session II – No More War: Can We?



The second session, moderated by Mr. Heiner Handschin, President of UPF Switzerland, explored faith-based and educational approaches to peace. In his opening remarks he emphasized the untapped potential of a faith-based approach in peace processes. There is a need for a greater inclusion of the wisdom and efforts of the world's religions, combining them with political, economic, and social perspectives.

On the outset of the conference, a message of endorsement of the event of H.E. Ambassador Mxolisi NKOSI of South Africa, was read. He stated that "South Africa's own journey from oppression to freedom, has taught us that peace is never the mere absence of war, but the presence of justice, dignity, and inclusion. Women were at the heart of our liberation struggle, and they remain central to our ongoing efforts to build a democratic, equitable, and peaceful society. South Africa stands firmly with all those governments, faith communities, and civil society organizations who work tirelessly to promote peace and reconciliation. We commend the Universal Peace Federation and its partners for providing a platform where diverse voices can come together in the service of humanity."

Ms. Frédérique Seidel of the World Council of Churches (WCC) reflected on the importance of healing as a prerequisite for sustainable peace. She drew from the Council's global work with children and communities, emphasizing that "if you want lasting peace, you must help children heal the ruins of their souls." Citing Poland's post-World War II recovery and Rwanda's reconciliation process, she stressed the transformative power of education and interfaith collaboration in preventing violence and fostering resilience.

Ms. Paulette Lacroix, representative of the International Office of Catholic Education (OIEC), presented the new publication "A School for Peace - Towards a Global Educational Fraternity." She explained that education is "a lever for reconciliation and equality," rooted in Pope Francis' vision of the Global Educational Pact. "Peace is built in classrooms," she said. "Teaching is already sowing the seeds of hope." Lacroix called for global efforts to train teachers as peacemakers and to ensure girls' access to education, inclusion, and safety.

From a youth perspective, Ms. Ejona Icka, Director of IAYSP office for UN relations, youth leader and peace activist. She reported on the recent peacebuilding work of youth bringing political leaders together in divided Mitrovica. She urged governments and donors to dare to invest in young people. "If you don't know what to do with your money, invest in youth," she said, stressing the potential of intergenerational collaboration to transform conflict into cooperation- enjoyably.

Mr. Stefano Bosco director of public and international affairs of the LDS community drew on studies linking faith, purpose, and psychological well-being, emphasizing that the foundation of peace lies in finding meaning through faith. Through a faith-based approach, starting in the nurturing environment of the family, peace can be learnt, practiced and taught. Simple traditions learned and upheld in families can be a foundation and future security of peaceful and cohesive communities.

Mr. Jacques Marion, Chairman of UPF Europe and the Middle East, wrapped up the conference by emphasising the spiritual side of peace. He noted that, although the United Nations was established without a religious chamber, it is time to introduce an Interreligious Council alongside political bodies. "Religion has too often divided humanity," he said, "but if it can divide, it can also reconcile." He encouraged faith communities to uphold human dignity and peace as sacred duties, echoing the conference's central message: there can be no peace without women and dialogue. He criticised recent government crackdowns on faith-based organisations and the imprisonment of faith leaders, citing cases from Japan, and the eradication efforts of an entire faith community and unjust imprisonment of faith leaders in South Korea.



Key Conclusions:

- Women's participation in peace processes remains alarmingly low, yet their inclusion leads to more durable and inclusive outcomes.
- Peace begins at the local and family levels and depends on dignity, education, and inclusion.
- Education and interfaith collaboration are indispensable tools for long-term peacebuilding.
- The international community must act urgently to resource women's local organizations and ensure gender equality in all peace and security processes.
- As reiterated by several speakers, peacebuilding must become the norm, not the exception.

