

## UPF-Washington DC's International Women's Day Forum at 7th-day Adventist HQ

Tomiko Duggan  
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**Columbia, MD** – The Universal Peace Federation-Washington DC Office and the Maryland Governor's Office of Community Initiatives held an International Women's Day Forum at the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Headquarters on March 8, 2018. **Jennifer Gray**, Director of the Governor's Interfaith Office, opened the gathering by welcoming the 100 or more guests. **Rev. Janelle Johnson** offered a prayer to begin, and greetings were given by Mr. Johnson, from the SDA group who welcomed all by saying this is the first big gathering to use the auditorium since the new building was opened. **Steve McAdams**, Director of the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives greeted the group on behalf of Governor Hogan. **Tomiko Duggan**, Director of Public Affairs, UPF-USA, offered a historical look at the development of International Women's Day which became an Official International Day commemorated by the UN since 1977.



Her comments connected this local event with the worldwide movement and the diverse women who stand together on this day to raise awareness of the "necessary benefits that women bring to every level of society." The first speaker was **Ms. Cheryl Wood**, an award-winning international motivational speaker, who gave an energetic and passionate talk about being "enough" to do great work. She led the group in a daily meditation: *"I am enough, just as I am. There is nothing I lack to become the greatest version of myself. The world is waiting for me to show up in my greatness. I am ready, I am willing, I am able to oblige."* She told the gathering that everyone has a unique 'fingerprint', a distinct self to serve and to impact the world in a way it has never been touched before. She said, *"You may feel unqualified but you are called, so stop over-thinking, get moving and then you'll figure out who you are."*

The second speaker was **Dr. Haideh Sabet**, a neurologist and who teaches at Georgetown University Medical Center. She is an activist for human rights. She told the audience that we all need positive ideas and actions. She uses mnemonics to help people understand how to improve ourselves. Her example used the word 'CAREER.' **C** – consult with others, especially outside one's normal group, and concentrate/focus on an idea. **A** – anchor ourselves to be able to deal with the ups and downs and difficulties of life. We each need a strong anchor to keep us grounded. **R** – reflect on our strengths and weaknesses; seek a mentor or the advice of a wise person. **E** – educate myself, leave no loopholes and don't cut corners; really fully educate yourself. **E** – expect positive outcomes, act as if you have a good result and go forward; if you stumble, pick yourself up and try again. **R** – rest, *"As a brain doctor, I know we need to rest; accidents happen when we are sleep deprived. Drugs are unhealthy, but meditation will help us focus."* She concluded with a quote from TV host, Oprah *"Where there is no struggle, there is no strength."*



The third speaker was **Dr. Marissa Leslie**, the Medical Director of Adventist HealthCare Behavioral Health & Wellness Services in Rockville, Maryland. Her goal is to educate people on the importance of attending to both their physical and mental health since both aspects contribute to wholeness and true healing. She cares for refugee populations in Haiti, Kenya, and Syrians in Jordan. She started by saying that no country can flourish without utilizing the talents of half of its people. She encourages the situations where children can play and daydream to combat depression. She concluded by saying, *"Love what you do and you'll never work a day in your life."*

The fourth speaker was **Dr. Zainab Chaudry**, a Muslim, serves as a Maryland liaison for the Council on American Islamic Relations. She focuses on conflict resolution. Her parents were immigrants from Pakistan, but she is an American, born in Baltimore, yet people think she is a foreigner because she wears a hijab, Muslim scarf. She said that in order to make a difference, one should be plugged into something bigger than ourselves. She referenced five points of advice she gives to others:

1. Stop comparing yourself to others
2. Perfectionism is a myth, flaws make us unique
3. Don't let other people's opinions define our reality
4. Overcome the fear of failure
5. Practice standing in your own power. Look in the mirror and say, "I am special."

She concluded with a quote from Marianne Williamson: *"We are all meant to shine, and we unconsciously give other people permission to do so too."*

The fifth speaker was **Patricia Celis**, the Bilingual Content Coordinator for Casa de Esperanza, a national non-profit dedicated to ending domestic violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking. A Cuban by birth, she earned a BA in Journalism. She began by telling the audience that she is a survivor of domestic

violence. She said knowledge helped her immensely; it empowered her to survive and grow beyond her experience. She explained that domestic or intimate violence is an effort to control another person. Control over all aspects of life, physical, emotional, psychological, and economic. Women are coerced to do sexual acts that they normally wouldn't. Some even demand not using birth control. Finances are even controlled by the dominant person. She warned everyone to be safe and be aware of the signs. She added that abusers are in pain, "hurt people hurt other people" and "healthy people heal people."

The sixth speaker came all the way from Nigeria, **Catherine Uju Ifejika**. She is a very successful businesswoman who is the current Chair and CEO of Britannia-U Nigeria Limited, a petroleum company for upstream exploration and production in Nigeria. She is the first female to serve in both of these positions. As a lawyer, she made sure that she knew every aspect of the company and its work. She said, that if you challenge her and tell her she can't do something then she will do it. She defines success as "someone who perseveres and does what needs to be done." She doesn't accept weakness because she is a woman. She said, "*You must say clearly what you want.*" She says that each of us is given a vision from God, quoting Jeremiah 1:5. She also said that knowledge is power, keep educating yourself. And never let your position goes to your head, keep your friends close. She concluded by saying that "*No one will give you what you want, you must take it, make it, but we should always work together.*"



The seventh speaker was **Cassandra Ferguson**, a radio-talk show host. She began by saying, "*As women, we have to be ready and stay ready.*" She said "*We should explore our inner talents and be a risk taker. We should try to do something we have never done before.*" She continued, giving advice, that it is important to know our own value, and to be quiet and look inward. "*God put me here with a purpose, with natural abilities and talents,*" she added. She extorted all to "*Celebrate each woman's talents and inspire others.*"

The final and eighth speaker was **Megan Enriquez**, founder and CEO of TRUE Conversations LLC, an online platform for facilitating transparent, real, uplifting and empowering conversation around life's professional and private, most stigmatized issues. She said that being the last speaker, so many things she planned to say have been said already by those who spoke before her, so she would like to summarize what has been said today. She said, "*celebrate each one's words.*" She offered three points:

1. Have more true conversations with yourself first, follow the Divine. How many of you get honest with yourselves? Be transparent with yourself.
2. Self-care – don't ignore your own self. Women tend to sacrifice all for others but need to take care of ourselves too. "*Tap into your intuition and follow it.*"
3. Once you know your decision, how do you maximize it? Bring diverse people together and learn from each other. "*I see you! And I would love to hear you.*"

The event concluded with lunch and much networking. Much praise was given to having such a diverse group of women speak on International Women's Day, 2018.