

WFWPI Reaffirms its Commitments to Justice and Gender Equality

Merly Barrete Barlaan
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WFWPI Youth Organizers of the International Day of Peace Celebration

The Peace Day celebration spearheaded by the Women's Federation for World Peace International was a day spent reaffirming commitments to work for peace, justice, and prosperity for all, and a day of highlighting leadership and culture.

Hosted by Kean University, the event took place at the sun-drenched modern facility of its STEM building on September 20, 2025, a day ahead of the UN-endorsed International Day of Peace celebrations with the theme "Act Now for a better world."



Keynote speakers: (L-R) Amb. Mario de Leon Jr., Sen. Joseph Cryan, Amb. Carlos Garcia Gonzales, Ms. Merly Barlaan, Kean University director for Government Affairs Craig Coughlin, and Marivir Montebon, emcee.

Craig Coughlin, KU director for Government Affairs warmly welcomed the participants to the event.

Merly Barrete Barlaan, UN Relations director for WFWPI, said that peace is doable and must start from within the person and radiate towards his/her family and community. She highlighted the education programs of WFWPI which focuses on character development of leaders to be responsible parents and

leaders of the community.

High level officials keynote the event

NJ State Senator Joseph Cryan (D) was in attendance, as one of the keynote speakers. He emphasized the need for tolerance in the public sphere to achieve peace, especially in the public sphere in America these days. "Listening, respecting, and debating as a necessary element of tolerance to achieve peace," he said.



Bridge of Peace ceremony with Ambassadors for Peace Tarisse Iriarte and Rosie Chawla.

Cryan is the chairperson of the NJ Senate Committee on higher education and the vice chairperson on the committee on commerce and joint committee on public education. He has served the Senate since 2018.

Retired Philippine ambassador Mario Lopez de Leon Jr. spoke of the leadership of inclusion and dialogue in communities in his posts in Belfast and South Africa. He said peace and prosperity are on the same side of the coin. On the ground, what matters is people to people engagement and partnerships.



Artists Lorena Ramos and Gotasi present their works of art as gifts to WFWPI

Retired El Salvador ambassador to the UN Amb. Carlos Garcia Gonzales offered a fresh insight into the situation of his country, that peace finally started there after several years of turmoil.

The El Salvadorian government, he said, has prioritized the right of people to life, hence securing the safety of everyone. Peace has been experienced for over a thousand days for the first time in many years.

Organized mainly by mother daughter tandem Maria De Lourdes Guevara and Priscilla M. Garces, both

UN Representatives of WFP, the Peace Day celebration was a success, with an attendance of more than a hundred people and amazing cultural performances by the Latino community. It was hosted by journalist and UN representative Marivir Montebon.



The newly appointed Global Ambassadors for Peace - Dr. Michael Akintayo, Ph.D., Aida Bartolome, Rosie Chawla, Ingrid Echeverria, Esq., Tarris Iriarte, Dr. Beth Maranzzini, Dr. Diego Fernando Munoz, Guillermo Reina, Max Pizzaro, Clarisa Romero, Dr. Marielos de Rueda, and Ria Serrano

Co-organizers were the Ecuadorian Foundation for Social Support, Always Forward, and the JCI North Jersey chapter, Calm and Mindful, the Ecuadorian Business Chamber, and Punto de Encuentro Internacional/Patricia Bullon. Kean University hosted the event at its STEM building.

A colorful display of art and culture



The Youth Ambassador for Peace Charlene Mae Bornea, Diana Calle, Sasha Chiriboga, Nicolas Maya, Patrick Penafiel, Rachel Beth Tamayo, Lisbeth Torres (not in photo), and Emily Vaca with Amb. Mario

de Leon, Maria Garces, Priscilla Garces, and Merly Barlaan.

There was a profuse display of art and culture during the event by the Ecuadorian dance troupe, the Balcon Andino, and the Latin Girl Dancers.

Classical pianist Hyowon Barlaan, played Home and Rachmaninoff's Prelude in G Minor, an advanced piece of classical music.

Brother-sister duet Shinwon and Jasmine Barlaan sang Where Peace Begins. The afternoon was made elegant with the aria of soprano Pallavi Seth.

Visual artists Lorena Ramos and Gonzalo Tayo Silva (Gotasi) exhibited some of their masterpieces that day and donated two beautiful artworks to WFWPI.

Gotasi created a portrait of Barlaan which was given as a surprise that afternoon.

The program also featured the Bridge of Peace ceremony, facilitated by the WFWP Elizabeth chapter. The ceremony focuses on forgiveness and reconciliation to peace. It was participated by two sets of newly appointed ambassadors for peace, international art curator Tarris Iriarte and UNESCO Center for Peace director for Education and Partnership Rosie Chawla, and father and son Diego and Nicolas Maya.

The new Ambassadors for Peace

Twenty Ambassadors for Peace were appointed that day, in recognition of their track record of peace building and enabling leadership in their professions and communities.

These are:

Dr. Michael Akintayo, Ph.D., Aida Bartolome, Rosie Chawla, Ingrid Echeverria, Esq., Tarris Iriarte, Dr. Beth Maranzzini, Dr. Diego Fernando Munoz, Guillermo Reina, Max Pizzaro, Clarisa Romero, Dr. Marielos de Rueda, and Ria Serrano.

The Youth Ambassador for Peace was accorded to Charlene Mae Bornea, Diana Calle, Sasha Chiriboga, Nicolas Maya, Patrick Penafiel, Rachel Beth Tamayo, Lisbeth Torres, and Emily Vaca.

Ms. Ria Serrano said that the event was well organized and inspiring. "It's an honor to have the ambassador for peace award. It's a challenge to live up with it."