

WFWPI Ambassadors for Peace Honored, Inspired to Continue Working for Peace

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The awardees of the Global Ambassador for Peace for 2025 Peace Day celebrations. Seated (l-r): Clarisa Romero, Priscilla Garces, Dr. Beth Marranzini, Ingrid Echeverria, Esq., Aida Bartolome, and Merly Barlaan. Standing (l-r): Maria Garces, Amb. Mario de Leon Jr., Max Pizzaro, Ria Serrano, Dr. Marielos de Rueda, Dr. Fernando Munoz, Tarris Iriarte, Rosie Chawla, Dr. Michael Akintayo, and Guillermo Reina.

Union, NJ - Ria Serrano is no stranger to receiving community accolades as a leader in the Filipino American circles in New York and New Jersey. She received the Global Woman Ambassador for Peace award, along with 19 others, by the Women's Federation for World Peace International.

"It's an honor to have the ambassador for peace award. It's a challenge to live up with it," she said in our conversation during the Peace Day celebration on September 20, 2025. Hosted by Kean University, the cultural event was held at the sun-drenched modern facility of its STEM building at Union Township. It reaffirmed commitments to work for peace, justice, and prosperity for all, and a day of highlighting leadership and culture.

Serrano is the current executive director of the PanAmerican Concerned Citizens Action League. She had been a software project manager in a technology company in Manhattan and former New Jersey state president of the Junior Chamber International before going full-time as a nonprofit executive.

The global Ambassadors for Peace were appointed in time for the celebration of the UN International Day of Peace, in recognition of their track record of peace building and enabling leadership in their professions and communities.

The Global Ambassadors for Peace

Along with Serrano, Dr. Michael Akintayo, Ph.D., Aida Bartolome, Rosie Chawla, Rosie Echevarria, Esq., Tarris Iriarte, Dr. Beth Maranzini, Dr. Diego Fernando Munoz, Guillermo Reina, Max Pizzaro, Clarisa Romero, Dr. Marielos de Rueda were appointed as WFWPI's Global Peace Ambassadors.

Dr. Akintayo is the coordinator for the NYC - Tuberculosis Bureau's TST Surveillance and Infection Control Program

He is an ordained pastor and district secretary of Christ Apostolic Church Agbala-Itura DCC New York and the recipient of the U.S. Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award (2022) and the Presidential Volunteer Service Medallion (2023) for his education and humanitarian work.

For Dr. Akintayo, "Peacebuilding is about improving conditions for everyone, everywhere."

In his reflection essay, he wrote, "At work, it means ensuring the health and safety of our healthcare professionals. It means teaching teams how to handle stress and solve problems together. Because a

happy workplace is a peaceful one. At home and in my community, peacebuilding means guiding our young people. It means helping families talk and understand each other. It means welcoming new immigrants and making sure they feel at home.

It's about different faiths and communities uniting as one. That's why I want to join forces with WFWPI. I want us to work together for two big goals: fair health for all, and stronger women leaders.



L-R: Priscilla Garces, Maria Garces, Patrick Penafiel, Rachell Beth Tamayo, Emily Vaca, Charlene Mae Bornea, Amb. Mario de Leon Jr., Merly Barlaan, Diana Calle, mom of Lisbeth Torres, Sasha Chiriboga, and Nicolas Maya.

We can build peace by teaching people how to lead with kindness, not conflict.

We can make the world better by giving everyone - especially those often left out - a fair chance and the tools to succeed. Partnering with WFWPI means fighting for fairness and building up leaders. It means teaming up to help people."

Career success coach Clarisa Romero acknowledged that her being named an ambassador for peace was a call for continued work to empower women. She founded the Career Satisfaction Academy where she works as CEO.

"As a leader, my mission has always been to empower women to embrace their authenticity and align their lives and careers with what truly lights them up. When women feel grounded, resilient, and empowered, they not only transform their own lives but ripple peace, harmony, and strength outward into every sector of society. Each of us has something unique to contribute, and when we honor that, we create unity through diversity. To me, this recognition as Ambassador for Peace is a call to continue teaching and modeling these practices - because the future of our society depends on cultivating inner peace as the path toward lasting global peace," Romero reflected.

Coming from a Puerto Rican background, she is a two-time best-selling author of *The Fearless Entrepreneur* and *El Emprendedor Intrépido*. She created *The Mindful Planner - Hack Your Day for Productivity* and co-authored multiple inspirational anthologies. She is Associate Producer of Deepak Chopra's *The Mindfulness Movement* film and has been featured in numerous international media outlets.

Educator Guillermo Reina said that being recognized as an Ambassador for Peace is both a profound honor and a living responsibility.

"Peace is not only an idea but an awareness that must be carried into every interaction I have with those who cross my path. It is the commitment to speak truth from the heart while allowing space for others' truths to be heard. Peace, justice, and love are not imposed; they are shared, cultivated, and nurtured through authenticity, respect, and compassion. My role is to continue fostering harmony, not just in words but through actions that honor the dignity of every person I encounter."

Reina is the Supervisor/Principal Intern at Somerset County Vocational and Technical High School. He also teaches Spanish. He is an adjunct ESL faculty member at Raritan Valley Community College who integrated the UN SDG Goals into K - 12 curricula. He is the author of Control de la Calidad.

WFWPI also awarded Aida Bartolome as Ambassador for Peace, being a life-long advocate and leader in the promotion of Filipino arts and culture in the East Coast. She founded the Foundation for Filipino Artists, Inc.

Rosie Chawla is the director of Global Education Projects and Partnerships at the UNESCO Center for Peace. She is also an Associate at Columbia University and an organizational and financial development expert.

Ingrid Echeverria, Esq. is a nationally recognized Immigration and family attorney and a recipient of the national award for human rights promotion.

Tarisse Iriarte is an international art curator and advisor based in Brooklyn. With her Cuban and Puerto Rican heritage, she curates exhibits that contextualize the intersections of contemporary diasporan art and Black visual culture across a socio-political landscape.



Ambassadors for Peace Tarisse Iriarte, Sasha Chiriboga, and Patrick Penafiel

Dr. Beth Marranzini, who is of Dominican Republic descent, is a social justice advocate, and award-winning philanthropist, public speaker, writer and book author. She is the National Network Strategy and Programs Director and National Programing chair of SOMOS BRG at Elevance Health.

NJ Commissioner of Hispanic Affairs Dr. Diego Fernando Munoz is another Global Peace Ambassador awardee. He currently works as Legislative Aide to Councilman Michael J. Silva and is the president of the Ecuadorian American Chamber of Commerce NJ. He is the president of the Ecuadorian Parade and Festival of NJ and currently owner and director of Latino Street news.

Max Pizzaro is a seasoned and award-winning reporter and editor. He was an NJ Press Association First Place Winner and recognized by The Washington Post as one of the top political reporters in New Jersey.

He co-founded the InsiderNJ, a nonpartisan website dedicated to political news in NJ. He ensures that InsiderNJ remains the leading trusted source for political news in the Garden State.

Dr. Marielos de Rueda is a Guatemalan human rights advocate, professor, and certified public accountant. She is a lifelong advocate for women, children, and persons with disabilities. She leads humanitarian initiatives as president of the Lions Club Guatemala Reforma and the Guatemala Chapters of G100 (Mentorship and Human Rights).

She has also held honorary leadership roles with the Benevolent Committee for the Blind and Deaf and the National Office for Women and participates actively in the Women Economic Forum.

The Young Global Ambassadors for Peace

The Global 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.

Charlene Mae Bornea is a certified public accountant, entrepreneur, and a youth leader at the UNLEASH Innovation Lab which brings together top global talents to create solutions to the Sustainable Development Goals.

"I felt humbled and empowered because of this award. I am leading an empowerment project for women and youth in Bohol back in 2017 and UNLEASH Hack USA. I am inspired to do more and renewed my commitment to build bridges and lift the underserved communities," Bornea said.



Clarisa Ramos, Dr. Beth Maranzzini, and Dr. Maria Del Carmen Santiago

Patrick Penafiel shared the sentiments of Bornea. "It is truly an honor to be named a Young Ambassador for Peace. This is both humbling and inspiring as it allows me to serve as a voice and role model working toward a more peaceful world. I believe that peace begins with empathy, respect, and compassion. We act on the belief that every person deserves to be treated equally and to live free from fear and hardship," said Penafiel.

A brilliant student at Seton Hall University, he also has talents in music and sports. His service record is also significant. He holds the rank of Sergeant with New Jersey Cops 4 Kids, guiding younger members and coordinating county-wide service projects.

Penafiel volunteers in patient care at Clara Mass Medical Center, assists the Newark Police Explorers, supports Newark council community events, and helps with Ecuadorian and Latino entrepreneur gatherings. His leadership and dedication have earned numerous awards, including the President's Volunteer Service Award (Gold) and multiple city recognitions.

The other awardees included Diana Calle who is the co-founder of the Young Women Foundation in NJ and director for the Union County's Office of Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs. She is a Board Member of the Kean University Alumni Association, a HISPANIC Role Model, and a member of the League of Women Voters and Mu Sigma Upsilon Sorority, Inc.

Calle is recognized by Front Runner New Jersey/La Prensa as one of the 30 Under 35 Young Top Latino Leaders (2021) and by Negocios Now as one of the 40 Under 40 Latinos (2022).

Sasha Chiriboga said that being an Ambassador for Peace is something to take to heart. "It isn't just a title - it is a reminder of the responsibility we all have to look for ways to bring people together. Peace isn't only about the absence of conflict, but about creating spaces where understanding, respect, and compassion can grow. To me, leadership means setting an example of empathy and kindness while standing up for fairness and justice."

Of Ecuadorian descent, Chiriboga is a new graduate of B.S. Politics and International Affairs at Furman University. She has extensive experiences in community outreach, crime analysis, and human resources and marketing. She speaks Spanish and English, proficient in French, and proficient in Citrix Workspace,

Microsoft Office Suite, Excel, and SSPS.

Nicolas Maya is an Engineering student at Mercer County Community College who maintains a 4.0 GPA while actively engaging in extracurricular activities, including the Finance Club. He hosts a radio show that blends country music with real estate insights.

Maya is the assistant to the President of the Latino Spirit. Beyond his own physical limitations, he is a student/community leader for people with special needs.

Rachel Beth Tamayo is a certified Industrial and Organizational Development specialist. She is a WFWPI UN Representative, leading initiatives in youth and women's empowerment. She serves as president of JCI North Jersey chapter.

Lisbeth Torres is a student at Temple University, taking up B.S. Architecture. She participated in financial mentorship programs, including the "Road to Wall Street" program with Prudential, and has contributed as a peer tutor at Science Park High School, supporting younger students academically and personally. She is active in campus organizations such as Delta Phi Epsilon and Temple Habitat for Humanity.

Ecuadorian descent Emily Vaca is a community activist and student leader at the Seton Hall University - School of Diplomacy and International Relations. Aside from being consistently on top of her class, she is deeply engaged in leadership, activism, and service. She is Brownson Speech and Debate competitor, active member of Kappa Kappa Gamma, leader for multiple cultural and professional organizations, including the Language and Culture Club, Prospanica, Minority Pre-Law Society, and the Palestinian Student Association.

Merly Barrete Barlaan, UN Relations director for WFWPI, remarked that the Ambassadors for Peace is the organization's way to inspire leadership aligned with its mission to develop and sustain leaders of families and communities.

Organized mainly by mother daughter tandem Maria and Priscilla M. Garces, both UN Representatives of WFWP, 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.

Co-organizers were the Ecuadorian Foundation for Social Support, Always Forward, JCI North Jersey chapter, Calm and Mindful, and the Ecuadorian Chamber of Commerce in NJ.