

WFWPI: Peace is Possible - The Demilitarized Zone Experience

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Dr. Rima Salah with WFWPI Vice President for Administration Merly Barlaan (left) and UN Representatives Julie Hatulan and Balla Mahmood.

Seoul - Walking into the peace forest of South Korea's Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) felt like entering the poster-perfect scene of a Korean drama that I avidly watch. The soft spring of life was in sight - fresh green leaves and gentle buds of flowers. This time, however, it was for real.

It's the event of a lifetime, I should say, that I shared this experience with some 43 women leaders from the US in the 2025 Korea Peace Pilgrimage to celebrate the 33rd anniversary of WFWP.



Refreshing tea time at the Peace Garden

Day 1 of the pilgrimage on April 11, 2025 was marked by a peace tour at the DMZ, a portion of the 248-mile peace buffer zone between North and South Korea.

With utmost care by the WFWP USA and Korea, we were served lunch and given a guided tour of the demilitarized facilities of the defunct Camp Greaves which is now a historical and cultural site.

Soon after, we walked into the peace forest and had tea and home-grown pastries in a Peace Garden owned and developed by a local woman entrepreneur whose grandfather fought in the Korean War. She spoke in Korean and translated for us in English that she had the support of the South Korean government in establishing her enterprise in the peace zone.



A tour at the military facilities of the defunct Camp Greaves

While having tea and cookies, we reflected and shared our thoughts on the experience. What a nourishment for the soul it was for me. Peace is possible, given the willingness of the people and the support they badly need from the community and government.

On Day 2 of our pilgrimage on April 12, Dr. Rima Salah, erstwhile deputy chief of UNICEF and assistant to UN Secretary-general Banki Moon shared her poignant reflection after visiting the DMZ.



Forty-three participants walked into the Peace Forest in S. Korea in the 2025 Peace Pilgrimage hosted by WFWPI USA and Korea

"Yesterday, we went to a demilitarized zone. I wish that the world is a demilitarized area," she said in her speech during the 33rd anniversary celebration of WFWP at the World Summit 2025 with the International Association of First Ladies for Peace assembly.

Salah highlighted that 2024 was the worst year for children because of wars in Ukraine, Palestine, and several parts of Africa. She noted that peace has to be based on justice, citing that every human being, and specially children, must have justice.

At the IAFLP assembly, women leaders articulated the need to end armed conflicts and focus on education to ensure peace and justice.



UN representatives from New York enjoying the serenity of the Peace Garden. L-R: Dr. Elaine Duval, Merly Barlaan, Marivir Montebon, Balla Mahmood (seated), and Julie Hatulan (standing)

The words of Costa Rican First Lady Signe Zeikate were inspiring, "Conflicts are resolved through dialogue rather than force." Costa Rica, she said proudly, is the first democracy in Latin America, the happiest country in Latin America, and the 6th happiest country in the world.

Dr. Carla Ochotorena, university president of the Western Mindanao State University in the Philippines said, "Peace is not the absence of war, but the presence of justice and dignity for all. Education is the weapon for peace, not arms."



Costa Rican First Lady Signe Zeikate at the assembly of the International Association of First Ladies for Peace in Lotte Hotel, S. Korea