

Women share leadership at Religions for Peace

At the 10th Assembly of Religions for Peace, the World's largest and oldest interfaith network, in Lindau/Bodensee Germany from 19 to 23 August 2019 women became more visible than ever. In the new board they represent 37%. And the next Secretary General is a woman. This is for the first time in the history of this global peace movement which started in 1970 and grew from 39 to 125 member countries. 900 to 1000 men and women took part in the assembly titled "Caring for Our Common Future – Advancing Shared Well-Being".



Dr. Azza Karam was born in Egypt, lives in the USA, is a Dutch citizen and researches at the free university of Amsterdam besides several other tasks as an adviser to the UN. Her main issues are religion, development, population, women's rights.

RfP has a global and some regional Women of Faith Networks which lobbied for these results during preparatory conferences in their own region and during the women's pre-assembly which was held one day before. About 150 women from all over the world and different religious backgrounds came together. From a women's perspective they worked on the five main issues of the assembly: positive peace, preventing and transforming conflicts, promoting just and harmonious societies, working for sustainable and integral human development, protecting the earth. They emphasized the important role of women in the peace building proces. Many women are activists in the urgent struggle to protect our Mother Earth, shoulder to shoulder with indigenous people. Just in the days of the assembly the rainforests in Brasil were heavily burning. The European women met on Thursday and closed their meeting by a foto in black clothes, thus connecting to the campaign to end all violence against women "Thursdays in Black". <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/get-involved/thursdays-in-black>



Important female speaker and longstanding board member of Religions for Peace is Ela Ghandi, 81 year old granddaughter of Mahatma Ghandi. She grew up in South Africa and was as social worker very much involved in actions to overcome violence against women. She held a strong plea to change the beliefs around the role of women depending on her husband. “We have to deal with the patriarchal nature of all our societies. Men and women should be partners.”



A delegation of women from the MENA region – Middle East and North Africa – had undertaken an impressive trip to Jordan to meet with Syrian and Iraqi refugee women and those who help them find a better life. They showed an impressive video report of this encounter – supported by RfP - in solidarity with those women, inspiring by the hopeful projects which are set up in this region.

Among the lightning talks showing concrete and practical narratives of peace making among religions was Leila Hasandedic, a young muslim woman from post war Bosnia. Having grown up in Mostar and having lost several family members including her grandmother, she never had crossed the famous rebuilt bridge to the other part of the town. A project “Two schools under one roof” was set up after the war to overcome prejudices among muslim and catholic youth. A catholic young man of this group is now one of the leading peacebuilders in Bosnia. He is the son of a colonel who is most probably responsible for the murder of Leila’s grandmother. He asked for forgiveness. They started a network and became peacebuilders together.

The assembly emphasised time and again that we should not stay with beautiful words. They have to be followed by actions on different levels. Every plenary was closed with a concrete action point to which the assembly members committed themselves: reduce or stop eating meat, stop or reduce the use of plastics and paper. Don’t waste water. Struggle against the injustice of the huge richness of some two thousand billionaires in the world over against the big crowd which has not enough even to survive. Talk to your governments to encourage them in creating just and fair structures. So that we can leave a sustainable world to our children and the generations to come.

You can read the entire final declaration here: https://ringforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/20190823_Declaration_RfP_10th-World-Assembly_EN.pdf

The Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women EFECW is member of the RfP European Women of Faith Network. From 2013 to 2019 Martina Heinrichs (EFECW Co President 2006 – 2014) was Co President in the RfP World Council. She attended the 10. RfP Assembly together with Fiona Buchanan, currently one of the EFECW Co Presidents.



Martina Heinrichs, Fiona Buchanan and Carla Maurer (former EFECW CC member)



Martina Heinrichs with Maria Olivia Tamele, Mozambique