

Poland Conference Summary

“A BEACON OF LIGHT AT THE TIME OF WAR!”

Amid the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Russia, as well as in the Middle East, specifically in Israel, Gaza, and Lebanon, the Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP) Europe, in conjunction with the Global Women’s Peace Network, held its 21st Annual Women’s Leadership Conference titled “Women Leading the Change: Towards Peace Building, Justice, and Social Transformation.” This event, which drew 130 women and a handful of men, took place from November 8 to 10, 2024, at the Regent Warsaw Hotel in Poland.

The welcoming portion of the conference began on Friday evening, moderated by Ms. Marcia de Abreu, WFWP Europe Secretary General and WFWP Spain President. Greetings were given by:

- Ms. Mitty Tohma, WFWP Europe President / WFWPI Vice President, UK
- Ms. Moriko Hori, WFWPI President / WFWP President, Japan
- Ms. Danuta Przywara, President of the Council of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, who emphasized the need to constantly protect the values of justice and democracy. She stated that citizens must be aware of their rights and freedoms, as well as their obligations.
- Ms. Susana del Rio, Member of the Independent Experts Committee of the European Commission, European Union, and Ambassador of Peace, Spain. Most recently, she authored a book entitled *Twelve European Women*, which portrays notable figures such as Berta von Suttner, Hannah Arendt, Angela Merkel, Ursula von der Leyen, Marie Curie, and Princess Leonor.
- Dr. Michael Balcomb, Chairman of Universal Peace Federation EUME, UK, passionately shared about the women in his life, particularly his own relationships with his mother, his wife, and the founder of WFWP, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon. He spoke about how profoundly these women have influenced his life.
- Ms. Aleksandra Skoniecz, WFWP President, Poland, noted Poland's progress since the 1990s. The country is now a NATO member, and its economy ranks 24th in the world for GDP growth over the past 30 years. There is minimal pay disparity between men and women; 43% of Poland’s top managers are women,

60% of university students are women, and 30% of Members of Parliament are women.

Before departing for dinner, a musical interlude was performed by Mr. Wojciech Skonieczny.

On Saturday morning, a “Meditation for Inner Healing” session was facilitated by Dr. Tina Lindhard, President of the CICA Foundation (International Dialogues about the Brain and Aggression).

Session I: The Role of Education in Promoting Peace and Stability in Society

a. From Conflict to Cooperation: Lessons in Non-Violent Resolution

Moderator: Ms. Margoth Kalstad, WFWP President, Norway.

Speakers:

1. Ms. Zofia Schacht-Petersen, Somatic and Developmental Trauma Therapist and Language of Peace Trainer, Poland. She emphasized non-violent communication, as taught by Marshall Rosenberg, noting that children naturally communicate without violence when their needs are met.

2. Dr. Iris Dotan Katz, Clinical Psychologist, Israel. During her presentation, she urged the audience to view the attackers of October 7 as victims of oppression and to see the broader narrative of conflict.

3. Ms. Carol Burnnock Kim, WFWP Vice-President, Ireland. She stressed that education should foster conscious living and address the psychological needs of children, which are often unmet in current educational systems.

b. Steps Towards Reconciliation: ‘Peace Starts with Me’ and ‘The Bridge of Peace’

Moderator: Ms. Katerina Minolari, WFWP President, Albania.

Speakers:

1. Ms. Joanna Gaspar, Coach for Personal and Spiritual Development, Poland.

She works with trauma patients, focusing on helping clients connect with their emotions and their “inner child.”

2. Ms. Carolyn Handschin, WFWP Director of Offices for CSW UN Europe, Switzerland. Her key theme was “familiarity,” emphasizing the importance of family rights centered on God to cultivate a peaceful world.

3. Ms. Marcia de Abreu,

elaborated on the Bridge of Peace as a restorative activity, outlining four pillars: A. Take responsibility. B. Respect for the opposing party. C. Repentance for the past and enacting a “personal ceasefire.” D. Commitment to the new relationship.

Session II: The Role of Women of Faith in Conflict Prevention and Peace Building

Moderator: Ms. Agnieszka Rosa, WFWP Vice-President, Poland.

Speakers:

1. Ms. Moriko Hori, WFWP International President, Japan. She discussed the WFWP's philosophy of achieving common peace through empowering women as educators and leaders in their families and communities. She beautifully introduced the founder of WFWP Dr Hak Ja Han Moon.

2. Dr. Tina Lindhard, spoke on “Conflict Resolution and Spirituality,” touching on the sensitive topic of abortion and emphasizing the importance of every family member's right to live.

3. Ms. Soraya Ayouch, Psychologist at Protection Judiciaire de la Jeunesse, France, highlighted the significance of harmony between religions and the balance between men and women.

4. Ms. Faride Romano Hadid, Representative of Neve Shalom/Wahat as Salam, Spain, described the peace village where Jews and Palestinians live together, emphasizing the importance of empathy and communication.

Session III: Empowering Communities: NGOs-led Relief Initiatives for Transforming Lives

Moderator: Ms. Amanda Toumangolov, WFP President, Ireland.

Speakers:

1. Ms. Asha Omar Geesdiir, Government Advisor on Human Rights in Somalia, Sweden, shared her experience fighting against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and advocating for women's representation in government.

2. Ms. Aleksandra Iwanovska, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland, discussed her work supporting human rights defenders and assisting disabled children.

3. Ms. Iryna Gould, Founder of the London Ukrainian Symphony Orchestra, UK, described her efforts to provide music education to children in Kyiv.

4. Ms. Marilyn Angelucci, WFP President, Afghanistan, recounted her success in establishing a sewing school for Afghan girls in New Delhi, emphasizing character education alongside vocational training.

Dinner concluded with a truly cultural evening filled with songs, dances—including an Irish dance—and the bestowing of honors, fostering a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood among all 130 participants.

For early risers, a meditation session was led by Britta Houston, followed by breakfast.

Session IV: Young Professionals: Women in STEM Driving Positive Societal Change

Moderator: Ms. Kefilwe Lebepe, WFP International Young Professionals Director, Germany

Speakers:

1. Ms. Stella Harris, Gender Advocate, UK. She shared her family history, noting that her father was a polygamist and her mother was the fourth of nine wives. Through the charity of certain individuals, she was able to attain an

education in Zimbabwe and later worked for a time at Santander in London. She believes that small acts of kindness can change lives.

2. Ms. Sophia Nicholls, Communication Officer and Director of Youth and Students for Peace, UK. She spoke about “Fashion Technology” and the pollution caused by the industry, highlighting the extensive water usage involved in cotton production. She noted the presence of textile landfills in Africa but emphasized that circular fashion—through recycling—can demonstrate how technology can help in reusing textiles. Clothing items can be resold, with the proceeds donated to charity.

3. Ms. Elham Kohistani, Human Rights Defender, Afghanistan. She discussed the “golden era” for women from 2001 to 2021, when women were able to attend school, go to university, and participate in politics and the media. However, with the return of the Taliban, the situation drastically reversed. In her own experience, her mother, father, and brother encouraged her to continue her education.

4. Ms. Kyung-in Van De Ven, WFP UN Vienna Representative, Holland. She stressed the importance of role models and mentors, advocating for local initiatives, speech contests, art, social media, and relief work. She emphasized the need for intergenerational collaboration to enable young professionals to come together.

Session V: Awards and Closing Session

Moderator: Ms. Brigitte Wada, WFP Europe Vice President / WFP President, France

Rapporteur: Ms. Aleksandra Skonieczna, WFP President, Poland. She wrapped up the conference with a cohesive summary.

Global Women Peace Ambassador Awards were presented, during which Ms. Moriko Hori emphasized that we are all winners in the pursuit of peace. President Hak JaHan Moon encouraged participants to engage in more advocacy work and to reach out to others. She highlighted the importance of creating an environment of sisterhood and finding mentors within WFP.

Reflecting on the conference, Mitty Tohma, WFWP Europe President /UK, wrote to the WFWP UK leadership and members the following:

Poland, a country rich in history and culture, served as the vibrant backdrop for the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) Europe's 21st Annual Women's Leadership Conference. From November 8th to 10th, this remarkable event brought together around 130 passionate women and a few supportive gentlemen, all dedicated to advancing the cause of peace and social transformation.

The conference acted as a beacon of inspiration, inviting leaders from across Europe and beyond to share their diverse experiences and insights on effective leadership. Participants engaged in thought-provoking sessions that explored the power of education in promoting peace and stability, the importance of personal responsibility in reconciliation, and the crucial contributions of women of faith in conflict prevention.

Conversations also highlighted the impactful work of NGOs in uplifting communities, showcasing how collective efforts can transform lives. Another engaging discussion focused on the innovative roles of women in STEM fields, demonstrating how they are driving positive societal change. These sessions created a dynamic atmosphere of learning and collaboration, where participants united to share knowledge and support one another.

The conference featured exceptional guest speakers whose expertise enriched the discussions, skillfully moderated by our dedicated leaders.

In a moment of celebration, women were honored with the prestigious Global Women Ambassador Award, recognizing their outstanding contributions to peace. This award emphasizes the unwavering commitment and profound impact these women have made in their communities, inspiring others to join the movement toward justice and social transformation.

As we reflect on the inspiring moments shared during the 21st Annual Women's Leadership Conference, we are invigorated in our mission to promote peace and equality. Together, we are creating a path toward a world where women's voices resonate and lead the way to a more just and harmonious society. We eagerly anticipate the 22nd Annual WFWP European Women's Leadership Conference in 2025, where we will continue this vital work.

Edited by Ann Kosco Schaffner

WFWP EU, Secretary (Freiburg, Germany)