

Religions for Peace

MOSAIC the women of faith newsletter

ISSUE 12, FALL 2007

Inside this Issue:

- 2 Action at the Global Level:
Religions for Peace Global
Women of Faith Network Plan of
Action 2007–2011
- 3 Letter from the Secretary
General
- 4 Women, Faith, and Development
Alliance
- 5 Letter from the
IWCC Coordinator

Updates from the Field:

- 5 Latin America
- 7 Africa
- 8 Europe
- 9 North America
- 10 Day of Reflection
- 12 Spotlight On...
Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton

**The Women's Program is grateful for
the support of the Ford Foundation**



**Different Faiths,
Common Action**



WOMEN, FAITH AND DEVELOPMENT



**By Ms.
Jacqueline
Ogega,**
Director, Women's
Mobilization
Program,
*Religions for
Peace*

Development is nurtured by two basic pillars: women and faith. I welcome you to *Religions for Peace* Mosaic Newsletter Fall 2007. Women of Faith are central stakeholders in development that is founded on religious values, motivations and perspectives.

In today's polarized world, poverty, war, and climate change are leading development challenges that threaten the well-being of individuals and communities. Women suffer disproportionately from climate change, war and terror. There is no doubt that distortions of religions have perpetuated social injustices, poverty, and the impoverishment of women and girls. Religious leaders and communities must remain vigilant, stand up against the abuse of religions and protect the human dignity of women and girls at all times.

Women of faith are working valiantly and creatively to overcome these developmental challenges and advance a lasting peace that is well founded on equality, dignity of persons, and cooperation.

The International Women's Coordinating Committee (IWCC) has adopted the Global Women of Faith Network Plan of Action, 2007–2011, which is summarized in this newsletter. The Plan of Action is a template for multi-religious action that reflects our commitment to harness the spiritual assets and unique development models of women of faith.

We must build alliances and multi-stakeholder partnerships to identify common areas of reflection and explore faith and development models that beget and sustain positive action and change. To that end, we

"There is no doubt that distortions of religions have perpetuated social injustices, poverty, and the impoverishment of women and girls. Religious leaders and communities must remain vigilant, stand up against the abuse of religions and protect the human dignity of women and girls at all times."

are excited to share with you our partnership in the Women, Faith and Development Alliance, a powerful new force that unites the moral authority of women, faith, and development communities to reduce global poverty through the empowerment of women.

It remains both our challenge and goal to advance true development and peace that recognizes the centrality of women of faith and their organizations, as well as emphasizes their spiritual assets and values.

I trust that we Women of Faith will continue to strengthen solidarity and re-affirm our leadership as development practitioners empowered in faith.

I anticipate that our partners and male allies reading this newsletter will share in our vision of a true development that draws upon and amplifies the deep-seated spiritual and religious assets of women of faith.



ACTION AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

Global Women of Faith Network Plan of Action 2007–2011

The *Religions for Peace* International Women's Coordinating Committee has adopted the Global Women of Faith Network Plan of Action 2007–2011. This Plan of Action serves as a framework for activities that will build and consolidate the capacity of the Global Women of Faith Network to advance peace and promote just and harmonious societies.

The Plan of Action identifies four priority themes as areas of multi-religious action to meet these goals:

1. Network Building

Network building is a crosscutting priority fundamental to the overall implementation of the Plan of Action. Women of faith possess valuable experiences and resources that, when mobilized, can strengthen community-based responses for peace and human development. Building the Global Women of Faith Network will enable us to:

- Share information, resources and capabilities.
- Strengthen and expand the unique leadership of religious women and their organizations.
- Facilitate multi-religious mobilization, communication and social action among women of faith working in different countries, locations, and regions.
- Fortify the operation and management of the network locally, regionally, and globally.

2. Peace and Security

Religions for Peace recognizes religious women's organizations and their ability to mobilize their grass roots and broad social

networks as key to building peace and advancing shared security. The Plan of Action affirms that women of faith have unique strengths in facilitating peace-building and acting as both mediators and advocates. It seeks to promote the peace-building approaches by women of faith that are grounded in faith values, relationship building, community mobilization, and human rights.

The plan acknowledges international instruments including recommendations in the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the United Nations' document, *An Agenda for Peace*. Like religion, these international instruments are complementary in emphasizing the centrality of women in addressing issues of peace and security at all levels.

3. Women of Faith as Agents of Social Transformation

In today's polarized world where armed conflict, terrorism, and extremism have escalated destroying the fabric of society and jeopardizing human security and development, it is necessary to affirm that women of faith play pivotal roles in averting violence and transforming conflicts. The Plan of Action aims to strengthen the role of religious women as agents of conflict transformation and to document good practices on the roles and resources of women of faith in conflict transformation.

4. Gender, Poverty, and Health

Violence against women is a pervasive hidden side of human poverty and poor health. Poverty and loss of livelihoods aggravate ill health in ways that dehumanize

and impoverish individuals and communities. This situation is compounded in conflict and post-conflict areas, where social infrastructure and safety nets have broken down. The Plan of Action acknowledges that religions can profoundly influence the status, role, and life opportunities of women. The focus will be to:

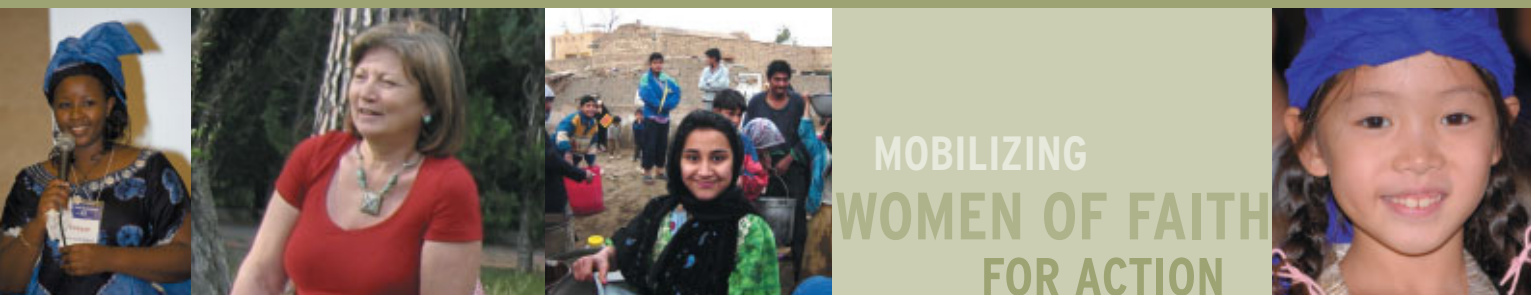
- Build an ongoing multi-religious capacity to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Deepen awareness and understanding on the intrinsic linkages among gender, poverty and health.
- Strengthen the capacity of national inter-religious councils and groups in gender analysis and mainstreaming.

To view the detailed Global Women of Faith Network Plan of Action 2007–2011, please visit our Web site at www.wcrp.org/initiatives/women/plan.

High-Level Dialogue in the United Nations General Assembly

On 4–5 October 2007, the United Nations General Assembly convened in New York for a High-level Dialogue on Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace. The aim was to promote tolerance and universal respect in matters of religion, cultural diversity, and freedom of belief.

Religions for Peace was invited to participate in the informal interactive hearing for civil society and non-governmental organizations on the afternoon of 4 October 2007, chaired by the President of the 62nd Session



MOBILIZING WOMEN OF FAITH FOR ACTION

of the General Assembly, H.E. Dr. Srgjan Kerim. This event allowed United Nations Member States to share information with individuals from the private sector representing diverse backgrounds, religions, and perspectives.

The hearing was divided into two sections:

- “Challenges of Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Cooperation Today” and
- “Best Practices and Strategies for Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Cooperation Going Forward”

Dr. William Vendley, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*, moderated the panel on the “Challenges of Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Cooperation Today.” The main areas of discussion in this dialogue consisted of the following questions:

- Who are the “main actors” of inter-religious and inter-cultural cooperation?
- What are the techniques in engaging cooperation and how have they changed with the advance of globalization?
- What are the main issues today and what are the barriers faced by the “main actors”?
- What is the relation between culture and religion?

Dr. Vinu Aram and **Rev. Judith VanOsdol**, representatives of *Religions for Peace* Women of Faith Network, shared their perspectives during the high level dialogue. Rev. Judith VanOsdol was a respondent in the session addressing “Challenges of Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Cooperation Today.” Both women participated in a roundtable sponsored by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA): “Enhancing Delivery through Faith-based Partnerships.”

For further information, please visit www.un.org/ga/president/61/follow-up/hld-interreligious.html.

FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL

Religious women across the world are at the forefront of the *Religions for Peace* mission of building peace. They work on the front lines of the great threats to peace: violent conflict, extreme poverty and disease. They work as healers, reconcilers, providers of critically needed services. They are leaders in villages, districts, and in inter-religious councils and networks on the national, regional and global levels.

Their irreplaceable leadership and service is provided despite the lamentable fact that the abuse of our religions has at times been used to impugn the inviolable dignity of women and girls. This contradicts the most fundamental teachings of our religions. *Religions for Peace* is committed to overcoming any forms of gender-based violence.

The thousands of women of faith groups that make up the Global Women of Faith Network in *Religions for Peace* have recently expressed their common will in the development of a powerful action plan. This was produced by the International Women’s Coordinating Committee elected at the Eighth World Assembly upon the recommendation of the Women’s Assembly.

The plan embraces and expands the *Religions for Peace* strategic plan. It sets out four strategic objectives for the Global Women of Faith Network: to enhance networking among women of faith globally, strengthen their capacities to promote just and harmonious societies, advance gender equality and develop strategic multi-stakeholder partnerships and alliances. Developing this plan of action has taken much hard work and dedication. I want to thank the International Women’s Coordinating Committee for their leadership in this process.

The women of faith in *Religions for Peace* have already built mechanisms essential for implementing their action plans. These are the women of faith networks present on the national, regional and global levels. They link already existing women of faith groups.

The women of faith networks are more than implementers of critically needed projects. Through them brilliant, competent, and committed women are mainstreamed into the leadership of *Religions for Peace* bodies from the local to global levels.

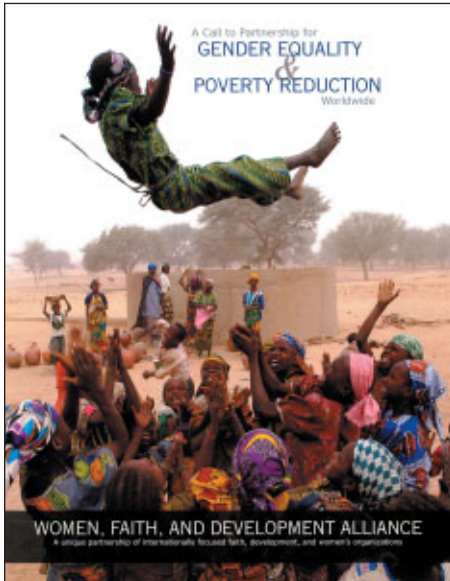
Please join me in congratulating Ms. Jacqueline Ogega, the Women’s Program Director, who continues to provide tremendous leadership for the Women’s Mobilization Program.

On behalf of our entire *Religions for Peace* movement, I want to salute the commitment and leadership of women of faith. They are already leading and they need to be welcomed at the very center of our common work of building peace. An alliance among women of faith groups that are working to build peace and helping to lead *Religious for Peace* can help set free the great rivers of peace that runs through the human heart.

In peace,
Dr. William F. Vendley

I commend the International Women’s Coordinating Committee (IWCC), led by **Mrs. Mehrézia Labidi-Maiza**, on the adoption of the Global Women of Faith Network Plan of Action, 2007-2011.

GATHERING IN HOPE PLEDGING COMMON ACTION



The Women, Faith and Development Alliance: A New Partnership.

Women, Faith and Development Alliance: A New Partnership

The *Religions for Peace* Global Women of Faith Network is a founding partner in a new partnership, the Women, Faith, and Development Alliance (WFDA). The Alliance combines the power of faith and secular communities to increase the political will and action to end global poverty through the advancement of women and girls.

With the help of supporting faith communities, women's groups, and development organizations, WFDA aims to affect policy change and increase financial investments for women's and girls' empowerment.

The mission of WFDA rests on the conviction that empowered women are agents for development, and that promoting the equality of women and girls helps to reduce poverty and to benefit entire societies. The United Nations Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs) established in 2000 call for gender equality and a 50 percent reduction in global poverty by 2015. The WFDA advocates that by tackling the MDGs from a gender perspective, these objectives can be more quickly and effectively achieved.

Religions for Peace will play a leadership role in realizing WFDA's goals by supporting the Alliance in multi-religious action on several core activities. By mobilizing women of faith, *Religions for Peace* and WFDA may better influence policy at the local, regional, and national levels. *Religions for Peace* will also support the implementation of Millennium Development Goal #3 on gender equality and women's empowerment, and will assess the impact of government policies on women. By monitoring the real-life experiences of women, *Religions for Peace* will help bridge the gap between political policy and practice.

In April 2008 the WFDA will convene leaders from faith communities, governments, donors, and NGOs for "Breakthrough: The Women, Faith and Development Summit to End Global Poverty." Breakthrough will launch the WFDA's five-year advocacy and action campaign for gender equality and women's empowerment. The Summit will also be a forum for leaders to announce new commitments to engender global poverty-alleviation efforts

In addition to *Religions for Peace*, co-founders of the WFDA include Washington National Cathedral's Center for Global Justice and Reconciliation, InterAction's Commission on the Advancement of Women, and the Women's Edge Coalition. For more information on joining the alliance, please visit WFDA website at www.wfd-alliance.org.

CONGRATULATIONS TO NEW LEADERSHIP

Congratulations to **Dr. Vinu Aram** who has been elected the first female Vice Moderator of *Religions for Peace* World Council.

Dr. Aram began her work with *Religions and Peace* in 1989 and serves as Co-President and Member of the Executive Committee. Dr. Aram has also played a vital role in building the Women of Faith Network in India and engaging women of faith in prevention and care of HIV/AIDS.

Mrs. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar and **Dr. Deepali Bhanot** have been co-opted to serve in *Religions for Peace* International Women's Coordinating Committee, representing the European and Asian regions.

Mrs. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, of the Interfaith Council of Scotland, was elected together with **Mrs. Yolanda Iliano**, from *Religions for Peace*—Belgium, as the Co-Coordinator of European Women's Coordinating Committee in a meeting that took place in Italy in May 2007.

Dr. Deepali Bhanot has been named acting Regional Coordinator for Asia. Dr. Deepali serves as an executive member of Asian Conference of *Religions for Peace*. She is a professor in New Delhi University. Dr. Deepali has provided tremendous leadership to *Religions for Peace* Global Women of Faith Network for many years. She previously served as the Co-Coordinator of the IWCC.

Congratulations to Mrs. Nijjar and Dr. Bhanot on joining the IWCC.



MOBILIZING WOMEN OF FAITH FOR ACTION

Letter from the International Women's Coordinating Committee (IWCC) Coordinator

Dear sisters,

Best peace greetings to all of you.

Whenever we turn on our television screen, we are stormed with images of violence, especially in the Middle East. It seems that the wave of hatred, anger, and conflicts will never end. We often ask ourselves: what can we do to stop it? We often feel helpless. Yet, we shall not forget that we always have something to do. First of all, I invite all our sisters, whatever their faith traditions and wherever they are, to include our sisters and brothers in the Middle East—especially in Iraq—in their prayers. Second, I remind all of them that to face the challenges of violence and insecurity on physical and psychological levels, we have to join forces and work together. We often share concern for the same issues: poverty, violence against women, development, stopping war, promoting understanding between persons and communities. We have to find common and shared solutions for them. This is not only a wish, it is a strategy adopted by *Religions for Peace*. Our approach “allows coordinated action among diverse religious communities on different levels, from local to regional to global, and serves as a mechanism for multi-stakeholder partnerships.”

To achieve our goals, we have to remember the importance of grassroots relationships and networks, and of formal and informal education of youth and adults. Women's role is essential in these fields. You are all sources of creativity and forces of suggestion. Sisters, we need your ideas, your input, and your experience to advance together.

On 18 September 2007, the IWCC adopted the Plan of Action, 2007–2011, inspired by your different contributions made at the Kyoto Assembly. We want it to be a common document that will enhance our work together on global, regional, and national levels. The implementation of this Plan of Action will depend on your own activities and priorities on your region. This plan is yours; it has been published on our Web site and more communication follows through our regional and national coordinating mechanisms. It is up to you to transform it into reality! It depends only on your work on the ground.

In your name, I welcome Mrs. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar and Dr. Deepali Bhanot, the new members co-opted by IWCC as coordinators of the European and Asian women of faith networks. Last but not least, as we seek to expand our partnerships, we are happy to announce that we have joined the Women, Faith and Development Alliance, a partnership that brings together more than seventy organizations from the United States of America and the developing world to advocate for the alleviation of poverty and promote gender equality worldwide.

Salam. Peace for all of you.

Mrs. Mehrézia Labidi-Maiza
Coordinator, *Religions for Peace*
International Women's
Coordinating Committee



UPDATES FROM THE FIELD

Latin American and the Caribbean Women of Faith Network



By Ms.
Valeria Gatti,
Regional Latin
America
and Caribbean
Program
Associate,
*Religions
for Peace*

Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Forum on HIV/AIDS

The *Religions for Peace* Latin America and Caribbean Women of Faith Network is engaging women from the religious community in addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic. On 17 April 2007, religious leaders came together for the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Pre-Forum, on HIV/AIDS and STDs in Argentina. Women played a central part in the forum and the second session of the Pre-Forum focused almost exclusively on the particular challenges of HIV and AIDS in women and children.

Women played a central part in the forum and the second session of the Pre-Forum focused almost exclusively on the particular challenges of HIV and AIDS in women and children.

Women at the session pointed out the need to attack injustices related to the epidemic; one main injustice is gender. They also encouraged religious leaders to take on

UPDATES FROM THE FIELD continued on next page



UPDATES FROM THE FIELD continued

greater commitments with regard to the equality of women and to recognize the necessity of justice, social inclusiveness, and human rights.

Also playing a leadership role in the forum were **Rev. Judith VanOsdol**, Moderator of the Coordinating Committee of the Latin American and Caribbean Women of Faith Network (LACWFN); **Sheikha Amina Al-Jerrahi**, member of the Coordinating Committee of the LACWFN; and **Ms. Viviana Figueroa** from the Latin American Inter-religious Youth Network of *Religions for Peace* (LAIYN).

II Meeting of the Caribbean Inter-religious Network (CIRN)

On 5–6 June 2007, Caribbean religious leaders and women of faith came together for II Meeting of the Caribbean Inter-religious Network (CIRN), in Guyana. Participants condemned religious- and gender-based violence in a joint statement and noted with concern the alleged terror plot directed at New York's John F. Kennedy Airport involving Caribbean nationals. The joint statement condemned "acts of terrorism in any part of the world, whether in the name of religion or with any other motives," and cautioned against religious profiling.



Religious leaders of the Caribbean gathered together to discuss their shared concerns in the region.

Women religious leaders played a central role at the meeting by identifying specific areas for inter-religious dialogue and action, including domestic violence against women and children. To advance these issues, women of faith from the Caribbean who attended the meeting—members of the Caribbean Women of Faith Network—will meet in February 2008 to address violence against women from a faith perspective.

Tenth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean of the ECLAC

From 6–9 August 2007, the LACWFN through two representatives, **Rev. Judith VanOsdol** and **Mrs. Evelyn Falck**, and one member of the regional staff, **Ms. Valeria Gatti**, took part in the 10th Regional Conference on Women held by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Quito, Ecuador.

Presidents and heads of women's ministries from different member countries, United Nations bodies, and non-governmental organizations gathered together to discuss fundamental issues for gender equity. Key issues on the agenda included the contribution of women to the economy—especially



Women of faith of the Caribbean raising their voices in a Caribbean religious leader's meeting in Guyana.

in relation to unpaid work performed by women—and the equal political participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels.

At the conference, participants discussed pressing concerns, including gender-based violence, the sexual division of labor, and the feminization of poverty. Finally, the ECLAC presented the document "*Women's Contribution to Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean*," which may be downloaded at www.eclac.org.

In addition, the Latin American and Caribbean Women of Faith Network launched an online forum for leaders to share success stories, challenges, and best practices to overcome violence against women. We encourage women of faith from Latin



Women of Faith from Latin America and the Caribbean, along with representatives of UNFPA and UNICEF, expressed their concerns in the issues of women, children, and HIV/AIDS.

MOBILIZING WOMEN OF FAITH FOR ACTION



America and the Caribbean to continue participating with their comments! For more information or to become involved, visit www.religionsexporlapaz.org/foro/.

African Women of Faith Network



By Ms. Emma Kang'ethe, African Women's Project Director, *Religions for Peace*

Consultation on peacebuilding

The *Religions for Peace* African Women of Faith Network is taking action to engage women in peacebuilding efforts in the Great Lakes Region. On 14–17 May 2007, the Inter-religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) Conflict Transformation Program, with support from *Religions for Peace*–Africa, organized a four-day consultative meeting on multi-religious cooperation and partnership for conflict transformation in the area.

Senior religious leaders participated from Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya, Tanzania, and Sudan.

The central objectives of the consultative meeting were:

- To establish ongoing action of the Great Lakes Inter-Religious Peace Network
- To establish a platform to address the inter-related nature of the region's challenges, and to share best practices; and
- To establish mechanisms to build a culture of peace that cuts across national, political, and religious borders.

One major outcome of this conference was the launch of a working group composed of

nine religious leaders to work with the African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL) for lasting peace in the Great Lakes region. The event marked the first time in peacebuilding efforts in the Great Lakes Region that the contributions of women were formally recognized. Two women of faith representatives were nominated to the working group. The commitment shown by religious leaders in involving women in the search for lasting peace constitutes a bold move that provides expanded opportunities for the involvement of women. The women will actively participate in the peace process and translate these commitments into concrete actions at the regional, sub-regional, and national levels.

Gender-Based Violence Regional Training

The *Religions for Peace* African Women of Faith Network, in collaboration with Constella Futures Health Policy Initiative, held a regional training on gender-based violence as it links to HIV/AIDS in Nairobi, Kenya, on 30 July–2 August 2007. The training was the first in a series of activities aimed at creating ongoing capacity for religious leaders to respond to gender-based violence in their communities. Twenty-three participants from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, South Africa, Liberia, Ghana and DR Congo attended. **Sheikh Shaban Mubajje**, the Grand Mufti of Uganda who is also the Co-chair of ACRL gave the key-note address. The training was graced by other senior religious leaders including the **Rev. Dr. Mvume Dandala**, the General Secretary of All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) and the **Rev. Fr. Vincent Wambugu** the Secretary General of Kenya Catholic Secretariat, senior government officers, and a member of parliament from Kenya.

UPDATES FROM THE FIELD continued on next page



Sheikh Shaban Mubajje, Grand Mufti of Uganda, gives the opening remarks for the Regional Gender-Based Violence training for religious leaders held in Nairobi, Kenya.



Women and men of faith discuss faith-based action during the Regional Gender-Based Violence training for Religious leaders held in Nairobi, Kenya.



Members of the African Women of Faith Network participated in the consultative meeting on multi-religious peace building in the Great Lakes Region.



UPDATES FROM THE FIELD continued

They called on religious institutions to revitalize family life values programs. The Religions for Peace African Women of Faith Network was urged to make deliberate efforts to reach out to men and boys.

Participants shared perspectives and experiences and developed country-based plans of action geared toward raising awareness on gender-based violence in their countries. They also developed and signed a Communiqué containing recommendations to various stakeholders as a part of their commitment to combating gender-based violence. An important recommendation called on religious leaders to educate their congregations and communities through religious texts to create awareness and knowledge on gender-based violence, as well as promote responsible behaviors, respect and



Twenty-three religious leaders from eight countries gathered in Nairobi, Kenya, for the Regional Gender-Based Violence training.



Religious leaders participating in a Regional training on Gender-Based Violence in Nairobi, Kenya.

dignity of all persons, and defend the sanctity of life. They called on religious institutions to revitalize family life values programs. The *Religions for Peace* African Women of Faith Network was urged to make deliberate efforts to reach out to boys and men who are the main perpetrators of gender-based violence. Each participating country will receive \$5,000 to assist them in the implementation of their plans of action drawn at the end of the training.

Upcoming in Africa

Religious Leaders Forum on Gender-Based Violence: The African Religious Leaders Forum on Gender-Based Violence will take place in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, in November 2007. The Forum will engage the Executive Committee of the African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL) in a pro-active move against gender-based violence. This forum will culminate in sharing the outcomes on ongoing national gender-based violence activities and a Strategy and Advocacy Statement on gender-based violence from the ACRL.

European Women of Faith Network

By Mrs. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar and Ms. Yolande Iliano, Co-Coordinators *Religions for Peace* European Women's Coordinating Committee

On 16–17 May 2007, women of faith from eight countries across Europe assembled in Rome, Italy, to launch the *Religions for Peace* European Women's Coordinating Committee (EWCC). The committee—which will include fifteen to twenty representatives—will function primarily as the leadership body in building the European Women of Faith Network, but

will also provide direction and support in enhancing women's roles in *Religions for Peace* in Europe and the European Council of Religious Leaders.

The initial meeting in Rome brought together representatives of Christian, Islamic, and Sikh religious organizations from Bosnia, Scotland, Hungary, Belgium, France, Sweden, Spain, Italy, and Britain.

At the meeting, the committee elected two main coordinators for the EWCC: **Mrs. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar** from the Interfaith Council of Scotland and **Mrs. Yolande Iliano** from *Religions for Peace*–Belgium. The group was moderated by **Mrs. Mehrézia Labidi-Maiza**, Coordinator of the *Religions for Peace* International Women's Coordinating Committee. She guided the meeting as participants identified core objectives for the European Women of Faith Network. They focused on strengthening the leadership role of women of faith, forging ties with both faith-based and secular organizations, confronting HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence, and empowering immigrant minority women's groups in contemporary pluralist Europe.



Women of faith from eight countries, with the support of Ms. Jacqueline Ogega, Director of Women's Program, and Mrs. Mehrézia Labidi-Maiza, Coordinator of International Women's Coordinating Committee, gathered to launch the European Women's Coordinating Committee.

MOBILIZING WOMEN OF FAITH FOR ACTION



Upcoming in Europe

An important meeting will be convened by *Religions for Peace*–Europe and the European Council of Religious Leaders in May 2008 to launch the European Women of Faith Network and engage in a multi-religious encounter between women, youth, religious leaders, and regional, national and local political institutions in Europe.

North American Women of Faith Network

By Ms. Juliana MacPherson,
Women's Program Intern,
Religions for Peace

On 16 July 2007, twenty women of faith from the United States of America and Canada gathered in New York City for a consultative meeting on building the North American Women of Faith Network. The meeting was co-convened by the *Religions for Peace*–International Secretariat and *Religions for Peace*–USA.

Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*, provided the opening remarks, during which he highlighted the unique link between peacebuilding and women of faith. He explained that peace was the ultimate goal of all religions and that at the center of peace was the well-being of humanity and the family. Thus he said, this meeting was particularly critical because of the pivotal roles that women of faith play in promoting peace and the ultimate well-being of the human family.

The consultative meeting marked the initial step toward forming the North America Women of Faith Network, which is to become part of the *Religions for Peace* Global Women of Faith Network.

In order to provide strategic leadership and direction for building the *Religions for*

Peace North American Women of Faith Network, a North American Women's Coordinating Committee (NAWCC) will be formed, consisting of fifteen to twenty representatives. In constituting this NAWCC, consideration will be given to achieve religious and geographical balance and to integrate young women of faith. Once formed, the *Religions for Peace* North American Women of Faith Network will seek to collaborate with other organizations and UN agencies to promote peace and enhance implementation of international commitments, including the Millennium Development Goals in North American communities.

Participants identified issues for which women of faith could share good practices and advocate for action, including HIV/AIDS, the trafficking of women and girls, violence against women, and global warming.

Participants emphasized the importance of building upon spiritual, human, and institutional resources that already exist in order to promote multi-religious cooperation for peace and take collective action for the common good. Thematic focuses of the group will include peacebuilding and conflict transformation, the advancement of sustainable development, and the promotion of human rights. More specifically, participants identified issues for which women of faith could share good practices and advocate for action, including HIV/AIDS, the trafficking of women and girls, violence against women, and global warming.

Upon ending the consultative meeting, participants agreed to plan a major



Women of faith discussing during the consultative meeting for the North American Women of Faith Network.



The North American Women of Faith Network consultative meeting, held in New York, was the first step in creating a new coalition.

networking forum for the *Religions for Peace* North American Women of Faith Network in 2008.

Upcoming in North America

The Ad-Hoc committee on the North American Women of Faith Network met on October 19, 2007, to make recommendations for the North American Women's Coordinating Committee. The North American Women of Faith Network will reconvene on December 19th for follow-up consultation. A formal launch of the North American Women of Faith Network is planned for 2008. Please visit our website www.religionsforpeace.org for further information.

GATHERING IN HOPE PLEDGING COMMON ACTION



Day of Reflection

On 22 May 2007, more than three-hundred participants from various Islamic organizations gathered in Conakry, Guinea, under the chairmanship of Secretary General of Religious Affairs Elhadj Mahmoud to participate in a day of reflection and fight for peace in Guinea. Groups such as the Coordination of Young Muslims, the Association of Muslim Women, and the Counsel of Mosques discussed the crucial role of Muslim women in preventing conflict and maintaining peace.

After a brief opening ceremony, the conference began with readings from the Qur'an and an address from **Madame Hadja Mariama Sow**, President of the Coordination of Guinean Muslim Women and member of the *Religions for Peace* World Council. She called upon the assembly to pray for all those who lost their lives during the conflict in Guinea during January, February, and May of 2007. The sorrowful events of these months, along with concerns for the social and economic instability plaguing Guinea, played a role in choosing the topic for the conference. Madame Sow enumerated the reasons for the day's theme, strongly condemning the escalation of violence, the poor quality of education, and the pervasive trade of drugs and narcotics.

The overall tone of the assembly was hopeful, and throughout the day participants identified core areas for future development actions in Guinea. The chief objective of the assembly was to open dialogue among Muslim women in order to discuss their duties and rights as functioning members of society. As women, not only do they hold responsibilities as citizens, but they also have unique influences as

mothers, wives, and daughters. His Excellency Elhadj Mahmoud, Secretary General of Religious Affairs, encouraged women to take initiatives to promote peace and sustainable development in Guinea and to use these experiences to enrich their understanding of Islam.

By the end of the day, participants had set forth recommendations for future development projects and had demonstrated their will to hold future seminars to ameliorate education, fight against poverty and infectious diseases, and uphold the civic rights of Muslim women.



Muslim women gathered in Guinea to reflect on the recent violence and develop future actions.

Representatives of *Religions for Peace* International Women's Coordinating Committee (IWCC)

1. Mrs. Mehrézia Labidi-Maiza, Muslim, FRANCE, Secretary, Association for Women Progress and Coordinator of IWCC

2. Rev. Yoshiko Izumida, Buddhist, JAPAN, Dean, Hoju Women's College and Representative, Deputy Coordinator of IWCC

3. Rev. Judith VanOsdol, Protestant, ARGENTINA, Women and Gender Pastoral Coordinator of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI); IWCC Regional Coordinator of *Religions for Peace* Latin American and Caribbean Women of Faith Network (LACWFN)

4. Mme. Hadja Mariama Cissé Sow, Muslim, GUINEA, President, Muslim Women of Guinea, Executive Committee member of the African Women's Coordinating Committee

5. Priestess Beatriz Schulthess, Indigenous, COSTA RICA, Coordinator, Indigenous People's Spiritual Council

6. Mrs. Judith M. Hertz, Jewish, USA, Co-Chair, Commission on Interreligious Affairs, Union for Reform Judaism

7. Sister M. Victoria Gz. De Castejon, Roman Catholic, SPAIN, Secretary General, International Union of Superiors General, VATICAN

8. Rev. Gertrude Kapuma, Protestant, MALAWI, Coordinator of All Africa Council of Churches for Southern Africa, Executive Committee member of the African Women's Coordinating Committee

9. Hadja Katumi Mahama, Muslim, GHANA, Trustee, Muslim Women's Association of Ghana, Executive Committee member of the African Women's Coordinating Committee, IWCC

Co-Coordinator of *Religions for Peace* African Women of Faith Network

10. Dr. Nirmala Deshpande, Hindu, INDIA, President, Harijana Sevak Sangh

11. Mrs. Rajinder Kaur Singh, Sikh, USA, Vice President, Sikh Heritage Organization

12. Ms. Soher El Sukaria, Muslim, ARGENTINA, Secretary General, Islamic Society of Cordoba, Argentina, Youth Representative to IWCC

13. Mrs. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Sikh, SCOTLAND, Interfaith Council of Scotland

14. Dr. Deepali Bhanot, Hindu, INDIA, Asian Conference of *Religions for Peace*

* Regional Coordinators from North America and Middle East are yet to be nominated (One per region)



MOBILIZING WOMEN OF FAITH FOR ACTION

"SPOTLIGHT" continued from back cover

"I was quite determined to do both things side by side—have my children with me and do something I loved to do, which is study the Old Testament. Women ask me all the time, 'How did you do it?' and I say it was incredibly easy—but I think my answer isn't helpful. Some people would find it impossible to do what I did. So I always say, for me it was absolutely the best thing to do. I tell people to be creative; very often you can include children in your work. At 3:45 every day I packed up my briefcase with work and phone calls I had to make and walked out of my congregation, no matter what was going on. It was very important to me to be at home when the kids came home from school. Once the kids were settled in with their homework, I would make calls and do work. Sometimes I had meetings in the evening, but by then it was all right; the children were settled in at home."

On hard life lessons, early: One reality was that Rev. Dr. Hamilton's children often witnessed some of the challenging aspects of life in the ministry; for example, they sometimes fielded phone calls from funeral homes saying that people from the

Her mother served as dean of women at Teachers College and at one point taught 1,100 students, most of whom were returning servicemen from World War II. She then stayed home to raise her children, as was the custom of the time. But her mother went on to become ordained; mother and daughter were even attending divinity school at the same time. Her mother baptized Rev. Dr. Hamilton's own children, which is common within the faith community family. "I couldn't imagine it any other way. It's part of the context."

congregation had died. "My children were exposed to the whole range of death and grief." But they also traveled and met world leaders famous people and enjoyed a diversity of human experience that has informed them as adults; all her children have visited

the Middle East and India, "opportunities I never had at that age." Now, all of her children are at college age and have interests in international relations, law, religious studies, and politics.

On interfaith cooperation: "The bottom line is that we are all children of God. The Bible speaks of diversity. The Old Testament speaks of love for all people—the poor, the sick, the sojourner. When we look in the mirror, we see the face of God. The imperative for interfaith cooperation is even greater now; we in North America have not experienced violence. We must have interfaith cooperation. But it's not that simple to do it. Dialogue is key. It's why I'm so engaged in organizations like *Religions for Peace*; it's why I'm so engaged and passionate in this work."

The Women's Mobilization Program is grateful for the ongoing support of the **Ford Foundation**, the **Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, **UNESCO**, and **UNIFEM**.

Female Representation at Religions for Peace World Council

1. **Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton**, Protestant, CANADA, General Secretary, Canadian Council of Churches
2. **Mrs. Farida Ali**, Muslim, PAKISTAN, President Emeritus, Islamic Heritage Society
3. **Dr. Vinu Aram**, Hindu, INDIA, Director, Shanti Ashram
4. **Sister M. Victoria Gz. De Castejon**, Roman Catholic, SPAIN, Secretary General, International Union of Superiors General, VATICAN
5. **Dr. Agnes R. Abuom**, Anglican, KENYA, Executive Committee, World Council of Churches
6. **Mrs. Judith M. Hertz**, Jewish, USA, Co-Chair, Commission on Interreligious Affairs, Union for Reform Judaism
7. **Dr. Nirmala Deshpande**, Hindu, INDIA, President, Harijana Sevak Sangh
8. **Mrs. Karen M. Hurley**, Roman Catholic, USA, President General, World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations
9. **Ven. Dr. Grace Chung Lee**, Buddhist, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, President, Won Buddhist International
10. **Mrs. Homai N. Modi**, Zoroastrian, INDIA, Honorary Secretary, K.R. Cama Institute
11. **Ms. Stellamaris Mulaeh**, Roman Catholic, KENYA, Chairperson, International Youth Committee, *Religions for Peace*
12. **Mrs. Aruna Oswal**, Jain, INDIA, Vice President, World Jain Confederation
13. **Priestess Beatriz Schulthess**, Indigenous, COSTA RICA, Coordinator, Indigenous People's Spiritual Council
14. **Mme. Hadja Mariama Cissé Sow**, Muslim, GUINEA, President, Muslim Women of Guinea
15. **Mrs. Mehrézia Labidi-Maiza**, Muslim, FRANCE, Secretary, Association for Women Progress and Coordinator of IWCC
16. **Rev. Yoshiko Izumida**, Buddhist, JAPAN, Dean, Hoju Women's College and Representative, Deputy Coordinator of IWCC
17. **Rev. Judith VanOsdol**, Protestant, ARGENTINA, Women and Gender Pastoral Coordinator of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI), IWCC Regional Coordinator of the Latin American and Caribbean Women of Faith Network (LACWFN)
18. **Bishop Bärbel Wartenberg-Potter**, Protestant, GERMANY, Bishop, Nordelbische Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche

MOBILIZING WOMEN OF FAITH FOR ACTION

SPOTLIGHT ON...



Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton

Who: Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton, Toronto, Canada. Protestant.

Roles: General Secretary, Canadian Council of Churches; member of the *Religions for Peace* World Council; Chair of the Canadian Christian Jewish Consultation; and Chair of the World Federalists of Canada.

Education: Bachelor's degree in history, Glendon College, Toronto; master's degree in divinity, doctorate of divinity, The Emmanuel College, Toronto, thesis on the Old Testament.

On family influences: Rev. Dr. Hamilton grew up in an upper middle-class neighborhood in Toronto, the eldest of three children. Her father was a lawyer and her mother a home economics teacher; both were liberal and believed in social justice. One of her earliest memories is of her father coming home from an elders' meeting at their church; he shared that there had been a pivotal vote that evening permitting women to serve as elders. "I remember being very proud that my father would speak out—but I also was puzzled why [women's participation] was even questioned." Her mother served as dean of women at Teachers College and at one point taught 1,100 students, most of whom were returning servicemen from World War II. She then stayed home to raise her children, as was the custom of the time. But her mother went on to become ordained; mother and daughter were even attending divinity school at the same time. Her mother baptized Rev. Dr. Hamilton's own children, which is common within the faith community family. "I couldn't imagine it any other way. It's part of the context."



"The bottom line is that we are all children of God. ...When we look in the mirror, we see the face of God. The imperative for interfaith cooperation is even greater now."

On marriage, motherhood, and career:

Rev. Dr. Hamilton earned her master's and doctoral degrees while raising three children. Married at 22 and with young children, she continued to pursue rigorous theological study while balancing church internships, jobs, and family responsibilities, often with a babysitter one day a week. While doing doctoral-level study, Rev. Dr. Hamilton was pregnant with a third child; she was a teaching assistant for classes on the New and Old Testaments. "Later, I just brought the baby with me. Some students said they were focusing on the baby, who was so cute, but I told them, 'The baby is not on the exam.'" The coursework included study of Hebrew, Greek, and German; she already knew French.

"SPOTLIGHT" continued on page 11

KEEP US POSTED your work, your success

Send us your news and work, and we'll include it in the next Women's Newsletter!

Questions, comments, or news?
Kindly contact:

Ms. Andrea Louie
Communication Manager
Religions for Peace-International
777 United Nations Plaza
9th Floor
New York NY 10017
212.687.2163
alouie@wcrp.org



The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author alone and not reflective of any institution or organization.

Photos: © 2006 *Religions for Peace*

Editor and Production Manager: Ms. Andrea Louie

Contributors: Ms. Juliana MacPherson, Ms. Stephanie Alenda, Ms. Musarrat Yusufali

Produced by: D-Zine, Inc.

**Religions for Peace
Women's Mobilization Program**
777 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Telephone: 212.687.2163

Fax: 212.983.0098

www.religionsforpeace.org

info@wcrp.org

Save the Date

18-21 October II Meeting of Coordinating Committee of the Latin American Inter-religious Youth Network (LAIYN), Buenos Aires, Argentina

26-28 October Government of Macedonia, Conference on Religion, Ohrid, Macedonia

29-30 October Helsinki Process meeting, Alexandria, Egypt

5-6 November Central American Inter-religious Network meeting, San José, Costa Rica

19-20 November Faith-Based Organizations Roundtable, London, England

21-26 November International Youth Committee Meeting, Yokohama, Japan

26-27 November Leadership training for women of faith on Care for Orphans and Vulnerable Children, Tanzania

27-29 November Helsinki Process review conference, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania

28-29 November Religious Leader's Forum on Gender Based Violence, Tanzania

30 November African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL) meeting, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania

TBA November Advocacy Tour and Session of the Executive Committee of the Latin American and Caribbean Council of Religious Leaders, Washington DC, USA

12-13 December Sri Lanka Delegation meeting, Colombo, Sri Lanka

19 December North American Women of Faith Network Consultative Meeting II, New York, USA