



Standing Commission 2: Advancing Gender Equality

Roundtable Hosted by *Religions for Peace*

9 February 2021

Background

The *Religions for Peace* Standing Commission on Advancing Gender Equality convened on 9 February 2021. The five different Standing Commissions were established to serve as advisory bodies for *Religions for Peace's* work in the areas of the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, which was adopted on 26 February 2020 by the World Council. Each of the strategic goals advances *Religions for Peace's* multi-religious vision of peace, builds on its past work, and aligns with one or more of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Religions for Peace has a legacy of advancing gender equality, including the promotion of women's leadership in institutions at the local, national, regional and global levels, and will continue to promote it as a core goal. The meeting of the Standing Commission on Advancing Gender Equality offered an opportunity to review achievements from 2020 and assess opportunities and strategic priorities for 2021.

Discussion Points

Prof. Azza Karam welcomed the members of the Standing Commission and after a round of introduction moved into discussing the relevant agenda items. At the beginning of the meeting, Sarah van Bentum, Program Officer for Gender and Peacebuilding, provided an overview of activities that were implemented by *Religions for Peace* in 2020 under the strategic priority of Advancing Gender Equality and highlighted activities planned for 2021.

Prof. Azza Karam invited members of the Standing Commission to discuss the importance of advancing gender equality, especially within the context of faith communities, and invited members to share from their respective field of expertise, what is deemed important and which activities could mutually benefit each other's endeavors.

Gender-based violence was identified as one of the key themes and members of the Standing Commission welcomed, supported and reinforced *Religions for Peace's* decision to partner with World Council of Churches (WCC) to launch the global campaign Thursdays in Black. The collaboration around this campaign will be launched in March 2021 and all members of the Standing Commission are invited and encouraged to actively join the campaign.

It was further underlined that collaboration across sectors needs to be strengthened and solo efforts should be avoided. Intersectionality plays an important role when working on the advancement of gender equality, meaning that aspects of race, class, and gender need to be considered mutually.

Religions for Peace

For *Religions for Peace*, the global structure of more than 90 national Interreligious Councils plays an important role in achieving multireligious collaboration and members of the Standing Commission expressed the need to further increase gender equality and women in leadership positions in Interreligious Councils. Furthermore, the voice and work of women in *Religions for Peace* needs to be seen, heard and recognized in the governing structure represented by the World Council.

It was also discussed that male engagement in the space of gender equality is pivotal and needs to be strengthened more systematically within the *Religions for Peace* movement.

For the upcoming month of March, which is crucial to highlight and advocate for gender related issues and women's rights, all members will receive an invitation to *Religions for Peace*' hosted and co-sponsored CSW Parallel Events.

Action Points

- Ensure all Standing Commission members are invited to the CSW Parallel Events
- Include Standing Commission members in the 'Thursdays in Black' campaign
- Focus on the inclusion of youth voices in the gender equality advocacy
- Explore possibility to translate the manual "Restoring Dignity" to different languages and increase accessibility
- Strengthen and Promote Multi-Religious Humanitarian Fund and the advocacy around COVID-19 vaccines
- Strengthen Education
- Promote psycho-social support and the importance of mental health
- Provide learning exchange between women leaders and expert conversations

Annexes: List of Participants, Overview