

Standing Commission 2: Advancing Gender Equality

Roundtable hosted *Religions for Peace*

23 September 2020 (10-11 am EST)

Introduction

The *Religions for Peace* 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, developed through a most inclusive and participatory process and adopted by the World Council on 26 February 2020, contains six strategic goals that provide a clear and collaborative framework for the activities of the entire *Religions for Peace* movement. Each of the goals advance *Religions for Peace's* multi-religious vision of peace, build on its past work and align with one or more of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These strategic goals are interdependent; progress towards one goal contributes to progress towards the others. Six Standing Commissions – one for each of the Strategic Goals – was established to serve as advisory bodies for *Religions for Peace's* work in those respective areas. This Standing commission works towards the goal of Advancing Gender Equality. These Standing Commissions are the mechanism by which *Religions for Peace* leadership may directly collaborate on and guide the future of *RfP* Programmes in their respective areas of focus. The Council will act as the 'group of elders' to guide *Religions for Peace's* work in this space. The composition of this standing commission considered different areas of expertise, as well as different regions and religions.

Participants of Standing Commission 2: Advancing Gender Equality included **Ms. Lyka Rashida Mtambo** (Muslim, Malawi) Youth Representative, Public Affairs Committee – Member of the International Youth Committee; **Rev. Martin Schade** (Christian, Jamaica) Secretary General of the Jamaica Council for Interfaith Fellowship (JCIF); and, **Priestess Beatriz Schulthess** (Indigenous, Costa Rica) President of the Indigenous Peoples Ancestral Spiritual Council and Honorary President of *Religions for Peace*. Committee members were accompanied by moderator Prof. Azza Karam PhD, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*.

Opening & Welcoming Remarks

Moderator Prof. Azza Karam asks members of the standing commission to reflect on the ways in which this movement may best serve them and their respective areas of work, but also the ways in which they may contribute to the work of the Standing Commission: Advancing Gender Equality. Recourses are finite; the practical hands, experience and knowledge of the council members are the real wealth of *Religions for Peace*.

Sarah van Bentum reviewed the TOR for Standing Commissions and mentioned the Women, Faith & Diplomacy Assembly to occur in November 2020, with the support of German Foreign Office and Ring for Peace.

Remarks by Religions for Peace Leaders

Priestess Beatriz Schulthess reminded us that women remain the minority, specifically in councils at the regional and national level. The Standing Committee will have to be very strategic in how we move ahead. She suggested working in a transversal manor and carefully prioritizing the work moving forward in this Standing Commission.

At the strategic planning session in December 2019, Rev. Martin Schade brought up an important point surrounding gender equality. As a former catholic priest (Jesuit), and current professor, in Jamaica, Rev. Martin Schade is an advocate for the equality of the LGBTQ Community. He highlighted the differences between biological sex, gender identity, and sexual behaviour. Annually, Jamaica holds Interfaith Awareness Day, and has mad slow yet concrete changes regarding gender equality. For example, advocacy of the pervasive killings

of transgender and gay people in the country, as well as advocacy by parents for the acceptance of the LGBTQ community. However, Jamaica is primarily Evangelical Christian, and media outlets regularly publish scriptures against forms of sexuality.

Lastly, Ms. Lyka Mtambo spoke about the flight for safe abortions in Malawi. Religious men primarily make decisions in policies. The health sector does not protect the poor or women. She would like to see women's empowerment and decision making regarding reproductive rights.

Conclusion

A key area of engagement and deliverable is Women, Faith & Diplomacy Assembly. In January, the committee will meet to discuss the outcomes of the assembly and to determine next steps. This committee hopes to create a community. Prof. Azza Karam PhD encouraged regional discussions among multi religious leadership. Latin America was discussed as an area that may set the trend for regional sharing. Martin Schade is to work with Elias, Beatriz, and other Latin American leaders to co-steward an event/consultation to start talking about these issues. Together they can help frame how to host such a meeting, in hope of creating a regional consultation for 2021. *Religions for Peace* will help support this regional initiative.

Prof. Azza Karam PhD asked kindly that participants do not reach out separately to UN Women on many issues, they as an institution are conscious on how they engage with religious actors, having them agree to Standing Commission took quite some time. She also always encouraged members to engage with one another, despite meetings only occurring twice a year – once at the beginning of the year to determine what needs to be done and at the end of the year to review. [Sarah van Bentum](#) and [Christopher Zefing](#) will be the *Religions for Peace* contact persons.

Annexes: List of Participants; Nominee form; Criteria for Council; Programme for Women, Faith & Diplomacy Assembly