



Religions for Peace
UK Women of Faith Network

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

*Different faiths,
common action*

Religions for Peace 

United Kingdom Women of Faith Network

Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network brings together faith and interfaith- based women's organizations to work together for peace.

The Network raises the profile of religious women as powerful agents of change and creates visibility of the leadership role of women of faith. It harnesses the power and showcases the unique models of women of different faiths (and their vast networks) in transforming conflict, advancing just and harmonious societies and protecting the earth. The network allows women of faith to share experiences/knowledge

move dialogue to action



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A MESSAGE

from Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Chair of Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network



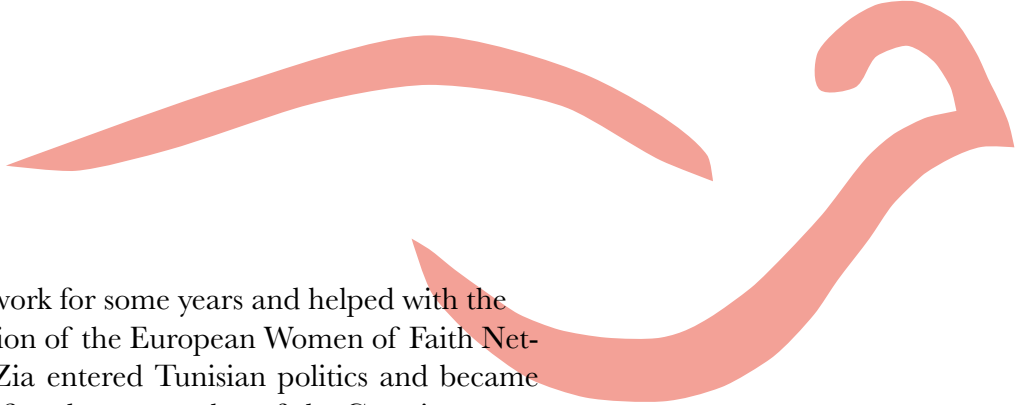
In 2020 humanity faced an unprecedented crisis as the COVID-19 virus spread throughout the world. Individuals, families, communities, governments were shocked at the number of deaths within a short space of time as medical professionals and key workers worked tirelessly to help those in dire need.

But humanity stepped up and in times of crisis we saw people coming together to help and care for others. Scientists, medical profession, industry all worked innovatively to help humanity. We all adapted to new ways of communicating and working whilst staying safe at home.

As Chair I would like to give my heartfelt appreciation and thanks to the Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Coordinating Committee members for their dedication and commitment in continuing to help communities locally, nationally and internationally. The first few months were certainly a learning curve for all of us as we tried to help our families, communities and organisations.

However, committee members continued to lead and assist with Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network (RfP UKWFN) events via social media, and we continued taking our work forward. A special thank you to Karen Maxwell and Rebecca Bellamy for working with me as part of the Core Group and Cinde Lee for her hard work in managing communications on Facebook and other social media outlets.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to a great colleague from the Religions for Peace family Meherzia Labidi who passed away from Covid 19. She was an inspirational leader, the honorary president of Religions for Peace International, led the Global Women of Faith



Network for some years and helped with the formation of the European Women of Faith Network. Zia entered Tunisian politics and became the first deputy speaker of the Constituent Assembly of Tunisia. She was the most senior elected woman in the Middle East and was proud of helping to include a clause to protect women's rights into the Tunisian Constitution. She will be greatly missed but her legacy of peacebuilding will continue to flourish.

As the UK is edging up to a second easing of COVID restrictions, we look back on 2020 and realise that it had been an extraordinary year in more ways than one. The RfP UKWFN 2020 report highlights work carried out in the areas of the climate crisis, violence against women, especially as domestic abuse increased exponentially during lockdown and interfaith work carried out internationally. In times of crisis, we find solace in prayer/meditation and events took place throughout the year to help with positive mental health and for strength and support during difficult times.

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar

INTERNATIO

In January RfP UKWFN reported on the global meeting held in New York which was the follow up on the Lindau Assembly which took place in August 2019. Plans were made, solutions were advanced, religious leaders made ties with government officials and diplomats and our international community were moving forward to face the challenges of the future.

In February Religions for Peace International was awarded the Roosevelt Foundation 2020 Freedom of worship Laureate which propelled all chapters of RfP worldwide to co-ordinate our work with our global partners to achieve our aims.

Although the pandemic was sweeping all over the world, but peace work did not stop with COVID19. RfP International was forging forward with their International Webinar on Interreligious Council Development: Securing Representatives and Inclusive Governance. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar our Chair was asked to speak at the webinar and drawing from her extensive experience in building up communities in both UK and Europe over her years of service to the Religions for Peace family, she spoke on the topic of “Building a National Network as part of a Global Movement”.

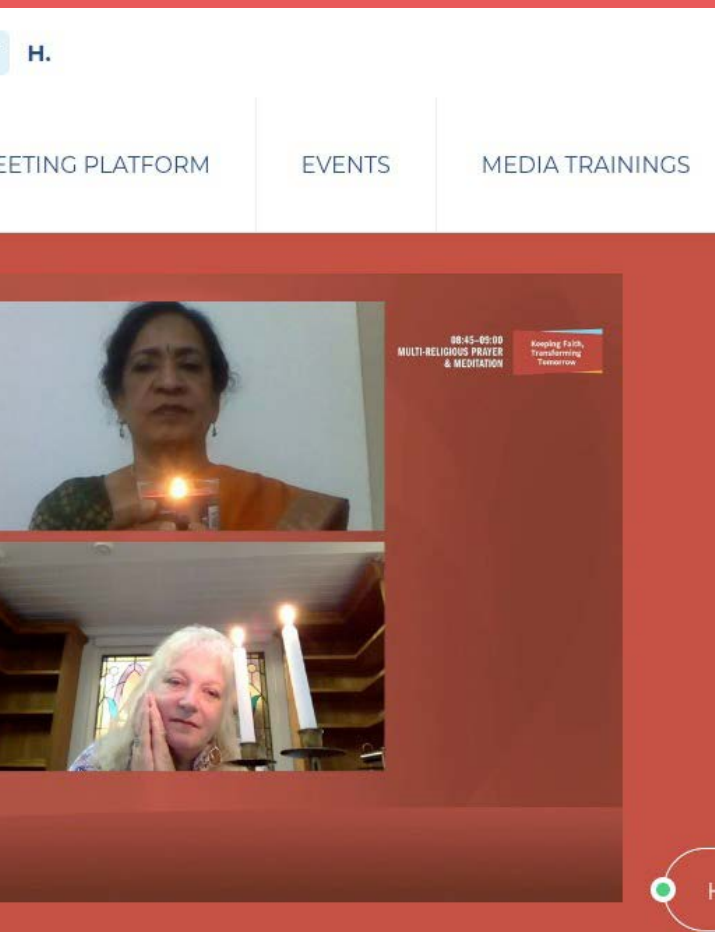
Members of RfP UKWFN were key participants in a joint meeting of RfP European women and youth in Warsaw May 2019, a multi-religious meeting organised by ECRL/ RfP Europe in preparation for the World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Germany August 2019. We are pleased to report that one of the project concepts that was developed at this meeting saw the inception of a new project, Speech for Change. The project concept was initiated by the “Conflict Transformation” working group at the joint Youth and Women meeting in Warsaw in 2019, to help in the fight to combat online extremism and religious hate speech. RfP UKWFN committee member Olivia Fuchs was commissioned by ECRL to undertake a regional scoping study and was able to visit and observe the course in Sarajevo.



Keeping Faith & Transforming Tomorrow

First Global Assembly on Women, Faith & Diplomacy

ONAL WORK



In preparation to the Conference, RfP UKW-FN called a consultation event called “Keeping Faith and Transforming Tomorrow” and contributed to a European position paper on the topic of Women, Faith and Diplomacy in Europe.

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Chair of RfP UK Women of Faith Network was interviewed by a German media representative about how she interprets her role as a female religious leader and what priorities she sets, that men might perhaps do differently:

“The term religious leader is not one that resonates with me. I consider myself as a transient spiritual being trying to serve God and Creation whilst residing temporarily on our Planet Earth. Women’s success is brought about by their efforts based on influencing outcomes through partnerships and networks, this special quality of leadership has enabled achievement in facing arising challenges throughout the centuries. Women tend to work by using dialogue and concrete actions, building trust and friendships between communities and people at the local societal level. This encourages community cohesion, a sense of belonging and a shared vision that we can build a better, just and peaceful world for ourselves and future generations.”

The monumental event of “Women, Faith and Diplomacy” Conference in November 2020 was to be held in Lindau with participants from all over the world, and due to the pandemic, the Conference went virtual. Four days of events included talks, discussions, plenary sessions, interviews and meditation took place as scheduled over the internet. The

Conference addressed the role of women in peace and security as being under-represented in decision making level, the RfP global family wishes to work together to raise the profile of women of faith peacebuilders and creatively bring solutions to challenges at hand and to sustain faith-inspired relationship in order to reach across lines of difference, including intense environments.

UK women faith leaders led a meditation session at the Conference and Ravinder Kaur Nijjar our Chair and committee member Rebecca Bellamy co-organised and delivered a workshop entitled “Role of Women of Faith in Protecting the Earth.” The workshop highlighted environmental projects undertaken by women around the world particularly looking at the effect of planting trees and how religious festivals could be made greener.

TACKLING THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Climate change awareness being one of the main goals of RfP worldwide, and in celebration for International Women's Day, RfP UKWFN organised a seminar at the Nishkam Centre in Birmingham to learn about what the different Religious Scriptures say about the environment, to discuss and collaborate action plans to help our planet, and to mobilise our faith communities for the UN Climate Change Conference COP26 which will now take place in 2021.

This gathering also launched the "Let Earth Breathe, Plant Trees" project. RfPUK Patron Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh and Ruth Tetlow, Chair of "Footsteps" spoke from the Sikh and Christian perspectives respectively. Lakshmi Vyas from Hindu Forum of Europe and Zarina Ahmad from CEMVO Scotland spoke on the importance of trees in Hindu Religion and in Islam respectively. Symbolic trees of peace were planted in the grounds of the Gurdwara in Birmingham, and a similar planting also took place in Edinburgh led by the Right Reverend Colin Sinclair, Moderator of the Church of Scotland.

Faith for Nature Conference took place in October supported by a number of partners including the Government of Iceland, the United Nations Environment Programme and Religions for Peace along with religious communities from around the world.



The Conference focused on the role of values, ethics and moral responsibility towards nature-based solutions and was addressed by more than 30 high-level faith and thought leaders and attracted 450 participants from 60 countries and more than 6500 viewers through live stream. Our RfP UKWFN Chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar moderated and participated in some of the sessions organised by the European Council of Religious leaders for the European Hub and the Chair of RfP UK Jamie Cresswell was a contributing speaker at the event.

The United Nations, United Kingdom and France co-hosted the Climate Ambition Summit 2020 in partnership with Chile and Italy.

This was a monumental step on the road to the UK-hosted COP26 that will take place in November 2021 in Glasgow, Scotland.

As we welcome in 2021, the Scottish Religious Leaders' Forum released a 'Statement

of Commitment' on the eve of the summit. Our Chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar represented Sikhs on the Religious Leaders Forum and as Chair of Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network and was honoured to read out the statement together with the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Revd Dr Martin Fair.

RfP UKWFN Chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar was keen to raise awareness of the efforts of faith and interfaith groups across the country working to tackle the climate crisis and to care for the Earth. The Centre of Religion, Reconciliation and Peace was asked to undertake a small mapping exercise to identify faith-led and interfaith-led environmental activities across the UK to assist Ravinder in raising awareness of the valuable contributions made by faith communities in tackling the crisis



PRAYER, HOPE & REMEMBRANCE



Then at the outbreak of COVID 19 in March, RfP UKWFN rolled out invitation of World Prayer Day for Humanity instigated by RfP International. Starting from 19th March, our faith communities were encouraged to pray for 10 minutes each day individually, as families, with friends and colleagues either over the phone or internet. Prayers were offered for the good health of all humanity, for courage and strength for those who have lost loved ones, and for frontline staff in all services.

In May, RfP UKWFN organised an Interfaith Service for the Wellbeing of Humanity over a Zoom meeting in partnership with Interfaith Scotland. The service consisted of short readings from women of different faiths and beliefs, and faith representatives offered prayers to implore God to help humanity overcome the pandemic.

Faced with massive shutdowns all over the UK, RfP UKWFN responded to a call for action by Big Ideas, a community engagement organisation, inviting us to contribute stones to the UK Holocaust Memorial. This was spearheaded by Cinde Lee who designed and painted the stones for RfP UKWFN. Faith communities were encouraged to paint their own stones with their members old and young, and the stones were to cause us to pause and remember the horrors of the holocaust as well as propel us to commemorate genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. The project helped us to build up links over a project, that even though we could not meet, we know that we are still participating in common action during the pandemic.



Untold Stories

Women Of Faith

Suffrage, Peace And Human Rights

A SPOTLIGHT ON WOMEN OF FAITH

Since Autumn 2019 RfP UKWFN has been collaborating with the Centre of Religion, Reconciliation and Peace at the University of Winchester, through committee member Rebecca Bellamy. A joint conference ‘Women of Faith, Leaders of Change’ had been originally scheduled for September 2020 to be held at the University of Winchester. Sadly, due to the pandemic this didn’t take place and we took the decision to postpone the event until we can safely convene.

We are looking forward to taking forward this event, which will place a spotlight on women of faith transforming their communities and transforming society

Interfaith Scotland co-hosted a 3 event series to celebrate the Interfaith Harmony Week entitled ‘Women of Faith: Working for Peace and Human Rights’ last year, marking the contribution of women of faith both to the suffragette and the peace movement. In June the final report to the event series as a resource for faith communities was posted and shared with participating organisations and the public. The resource can be accessed using [HERE](#)

In March 2020 just before lockdown started chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar was invited as a panellist to a roundtable event at the House of Lords hosted and chaired by Baroness Young. The event titled ‘Modest Fashion in UK Women’s Working Life’ was the start of a research project funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council led by Prof. Reina Lewis, London College of Fashion, UAL and Prof. Kristin Aune, Coventry University with Dr Lina Molokotos-Liederman. Ravinder spoke of the impact of conforming to dress codes for women of faith in working life. The report of the research project ‘Modest Fashion in Women’s Working Life’ was published in February 2012. It is aimed at employers and policymakers as well as the creative and fashion industries and can be accessed [HERE](#)



TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

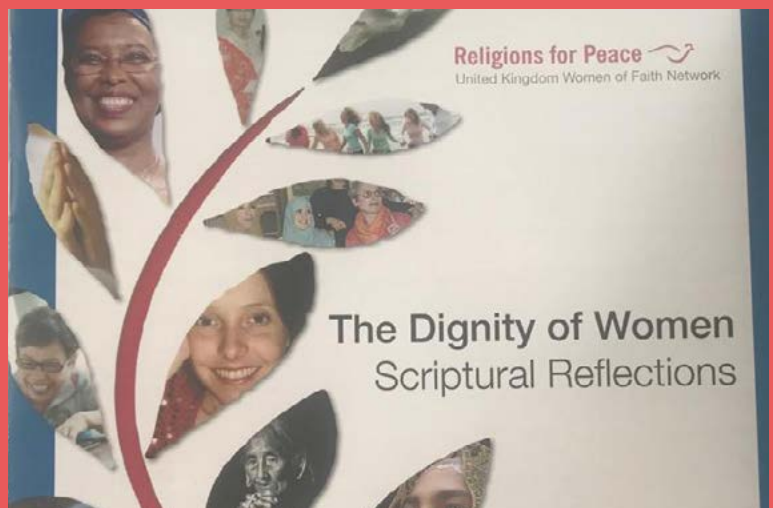
Challenging Gender Based Violence is a concern on a global level. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar gave a speech at the Aberdeen Interfaith Forum 2020 in November covering three areas: global and national fact and figures of violence against woman, myth-busting about false assumptions and inaccuracies regarding violence against women, at looking at scriptural texts from various faiths about their honour and status.

In the latter part of 2020, RfP UKWFN was awarded some funding to further develop its Dignity of Women project, to bring the Dignity of Women exhibition online, to develop educational resources for the exhibition, and to prepare training to be delivered to young men and women as ambassadors challenging all forms of violence.

The purpose of the projects is to educate religious and secular communities on the positive role and status of women within the Sacred Texts of the World's Religious Traditions and to draw upon the Dignity of Women- Scriptural Reflections Exhibition to challenge all forms of violence, with a focus on countering religiously motivated violence against women. With the lockdowns through the pandemic forcing isolation upon people who were already in vulnerable domestic situations, we were troubled to learn of the rise in domestic abuse and are so grateful to be able to push this project forward.

So even in the most difficult of times during the pandemic, our Network has not slowed their pace in attending to the various issue we need to address in bringing the world to a better place. We have a busy 2021 ahead of us and as we thank our faith communities and our constituent faith leaders, RfP UK-WFN is preparing to engage in further and wider scope of work in the near future.

We thank our friends and supporters for their contribution in the past and welcome their input for the future.



*let us engage people of
all faiths in common
action towards the
common good*

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COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar | Sikh
Karen Maxwell | Jewish
Georgina Long | Brahma Kumaris
Sr Brigid Collins | Christian
Varsha Dodhia | Jain
Harsha Shukla | Hindu
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Rebecca Bellamy | Quaker
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Dr Lakshmi Vyas | Hindu
Cinde Lee | Communications

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[Religions for Peace](#) is the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition- advancing common action among the world's religious communities for peace. Working in over 91 countries Religions for Peace works to transform violent conflict, advance human development, promote just and harmonious societies, and protect the earth. The global Religions for Peace network comprises of a World Council of senior religious leaders from all regions of the world; Interreligious Councils, and interfaith women and youth networks which are working at local, national, and regional levels as changemakers.