

## ANNUAL REPORT 2000-2021

Ring out the Old, Ring in the New

2020 has been the 50th Anniversary for Religions for Peace. We join our international partners in celebrating half a century of co-operation and learning from each other. Religions for Peace has developed from an organisation into a world movement. We are proud of our achievement, we understand we have more important work ahead of us, and we deeply believe that together we are a stronger force for peace in the world.

<https://www.facebook.com/religionsforpeaceintl/videos/1004570456691862>

Looking back to an extraordinary year filled with events and challenges, RfPUK presents to you our Annual Report of 2000-2021.

RfPUK started off the year reacting to a multi-religious and Multi-stakeholder partnership for Peace and Development in New York with over 250 delegates. The meeting was a follow up on the World Assembly that took place in the previous August in Lindau, where we welcomed our new Secretary General Prof. Azza Karam. Under her leadership an outline of a strategic plan was drawn from all the meetings discussions and dialogues from local, regional and international partners. Returning from that meeting, our trustees went on to formulate projects and plans in response to the international impetus and fundraising efforts were taking shape.

The impact of Covid19 on our work was immense. In response to such an unprecedented challenge, religious communities came together and all took part in a World Prayer Day on March 19, and other subsequent interfaith services of well-being and humanitarian themes. Participants were encouraged to post their worship photos to show solidarity, and that was the beginning of the exploration of finding ways to tackle difficulties and get around not being able to meet but still being active in our work.

In April, amongst the challenging times of not having enough PPE to go around UK, our Chinese partner the China Committee on Religion and Peace donated 20,000 face masks to RfPUK. Knowing that care homes are hardest hit from PPE shortage, RfPUK decided to make a difference on the community level and gifted the generous aid to Oakdale Care Group which manages 4 care homes with a team of approximately 280 healthcare staff.

In May, RfPUK was invited by the Big Ideas Trust to motivate our faith communities with an interfaith project to contribute painted stones to the future Holocaust Memorial which is in construction stage. The design of this monument includes a rock garden which is drawing contributions from people of all walks of life, with or without any religious conviction, to partake in the dedication to the 6 million Jews and all other victims of the Nazis and their collaborators. The Memorial will be located in Victoria Tower Gardens next to Parliament.

Placing the Memorial next to the seat and symbol of parliamentary democracy reaffirms the UK's commitment to Holocaust commemoration and serves as a permanent reminder of the responsibilities of citizens in a democracy to be vigilant whenever those values are threatened. RfPUK, our Women of Faith Network and Interfaith Youth Network each contributed a pebble, and encouraged our affiliated communities to take part, this was also an effort to bring some focus to the hours spent indoors during the lockdown.

It has long been discussed that Religions for Peace United Kingdom should become a Charity Incorporated Organisation (CIO), formally registered with the Charity Commission. RfPUK would like to thank our Chair Jamie Cresswell, our Honorary Secretary David Horner, and our Trustee Jehangir Sarosh for their tireless effort in bringing us to the next level of engagement. So on 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2021, the CIO of Religions for Peace United Kingdom was formally registered and started operation. All serving trustees from the old charity carried on with their duties until the next Annual General Meeting, and we look forward very much to a bright future with plans for projects and engagement with our multi faith and interfaith partners.

In July, our UK Women of Faith Network presented a talk entitled "Building a National Network as part of a Global Movement" at the RfP International Webinar on Interreligious Council Development : Securing Representatives and Inclusive Governance.

Also in July, we took part in a component webinar of a series aimed to highlight the governance guidelines of the worldwide Religions for Peace movement. From UK, one of our patrons and several trustees and representatives from our youth and women's networks took part. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Chair of UK Women of Faith Network, was asked to share her valuable experience of the steps and processes involved when forming the UK Women of Faith Network and the European Women of Faith Network. Work on this front is forging ahead regardless of the restrictions on travel, because although we all work in different parts of the world,

In August, we extended invitation to our faith communities to join a webinar called "Never Again" organised by RfPUSA as they commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We further encouraged all participants to remember on August the 6th of each year, the words of Hiroshima survivor Sanao Tsuboi, "On a map without country names, there is a peace bell that anyone can ring".

In September, the UN refugee agency and Religions for Peace formed a multi-religious Council of Leaders to tackle global displacement challenges. At the end of 2019, there were some 79.5 million people forcibly displaced people. The formal establishment of this first ever high-level strategy round table will lead to a cooperation platform to work across borders in addressing the pressing need. In the UK we also see refugee problems, we also need to develop multi-religious humanitarian support, and mobilises faith communities to welcome migrants and refugees. The huge mass of displaced people among us deserve a safe and secure life. RfPUK started a project plan to address the human rights of those who are less fortunate than us and this will be an on-going effort to bring the refugee issue to national attention throughout our Network. We are still at fund-raising stage and welcome assistance to this effort.

Each year on September 21st, the UN International Day of Peace is observed around the world. The General Assembly has declared this as a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and peoples. Last year, the 2019 theme of Climate Action for Peace was a call for action to lower greenhouse emissions, build resilience and improve education on climate change. As part of a global response to the urgency of climate issues, RfPUK entered into sponsorship agreement with Faith for the Climate and the initial capacity building stage of this project has reached a successful completion despite disruptions caused by COVID 19. Partnership between RfPUK and Faith for the Climate is progressing steadily and the interfaith climate awareness projects will carry on over Zoom meetings for the foreseeable future.

In October, RfPs all over the world celebrated the publication of the Global Interreligious Council Directory. Since Religions for Peace is a global movement and involves many chapters in local, regional and national levels all over the world, it has been some effort for member chapters to connect with partners from near and far, and a directory was sorely needed to ensure better communication and accessibility. This historic document serves to connect members of our movement, facilitate multi-religious collaboration and action, and raise awareness of faiths working together for peace.

In November, RfPUK took part in the First Assembly on Women, Faith and Diplomacy. It has long been a focal point of the RfP movement that women in leadership is encouraged and celebrated, this conference was the culminating effort for us to embark on the journey of redefining diplomacy with the power of religions, and the leadership of women and men together. This momentous event, held in situ in Lindau Germany with online international participation, marked a first on many fronts. Covid 19 travel restrictions did not dampen the preparation and enthusiasm from our global partners, and the event was held over online meetings, Youtube and Facebook postings. Ring for Peace, our Conference partner, created a virtual meeting environment and over the 4-day duration, there were panel discussions, plenaries, workshops, interviews, conversations during the Assembly presented an array of topics and concerns such as covid, education, climate change, hate speech etc. These events, some open to the public and some for delegates only, were delivered seamlessly over the internet. RfPUK Women of Faith Network presented discussion session on: "Role of Women of Faith in Protecting the Earth" and also led the Multi-religious Prayer & Meditation on the last day of the conference. The Conference gave us even clearer directives for the concerns our peace movement is taking forward. It was a time to share and to learn, to aspire and be inspired. We look forward to bringing our work forward with greater emphasis and attention to our female leaders and participants as they take their rightful place and exert their influence as integral part of global peace efforts.

May I invite all our faith communities, stakeholders, fellow peacemakers and friends to welcome in 2021. We look forward to a closer working relationship in the future and are confident that our efforts will bring more opportunities for understanding and common action. Happy New Year to all, peace on earth, goodwill towards all man. Please join us live from your laptop on 5 January for an international interfaith prayer for peace and health in 2021.