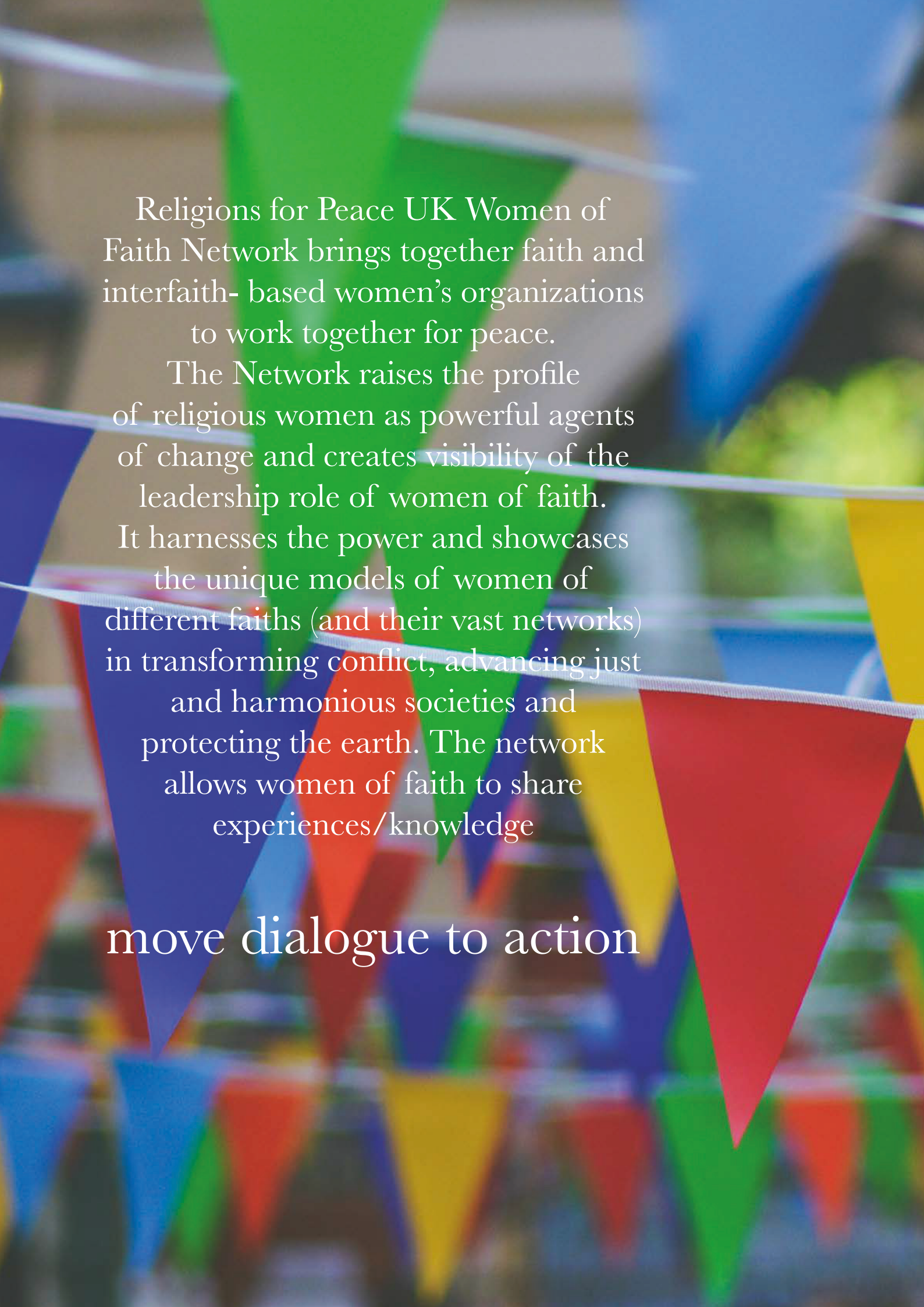
Religions for Peace
UK Women of Faith Network

ANNUAL REPORT 2022



Different faiths, common action

Religions *for* Peace
UK 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

A MESSAGE

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



The New Year began well as we started to return to normality. However, many events were still virtual, but it was wonderful to be able to connect with people at events. I would like to thank the RfP UK Women of Faith Coordinating Committee members for their guidance and commitment in taking the work of the network forward.

This year we welcomed Jenny Ramsden who joined us in August taking the Women, Empowerment, Dialogue and Peace Project forward. Jenny also works in multi faith contexts and is actively engaged in building positive interfaith relationship in her endeavours.

Our congratulations to UKWFN Coordinating Committee member Rev Bonnie Evans-Hills on being honoured in the 2022 Lambeth Awards and receiving the Hubert Walter Award for Reconciliation and Interfaith Cooperation from the Most Rev. Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury.

WOMEN & LEADERSHIP

The stories of the leadership role of women throughout the centuries has been unrecognised therefore RfP UKWFN have continued to highlight the incredible journeys and extraordinary achievements of outstanding women of faith. As exemplary role models of women in leadership their efforts and accomplishments inspired and encouraged participants. Our speakers shared their life stories, their struggles, challenges, and their viewpoints from both personal and social perspectives. We are very proud to report on these events and hope that their stories will inspire women.



Celebrating Inspirational Women

RfP UKWFN in partnership with Edinburgh Interfaith Association continued their series of celebrating the work of inspirational women to share their ground-breaking work and what inspired them to create change. Joining us on International Women's Day were Debora Kayembe, first black female Rector of Edinburgh University- Humans rights campaigner and lawyer, Lama Zangmo, Tibetan Buddhist Nun, and Head Teacher of Kagyu Samye Dzong and Olivia Marks-Goldman, Chief Executive of Holocaust Memorial Day Trust.

Karen Maxwell, Coordinating Committee member welcomed the panelists and participants. Lama Zangmo spoke about her unexpected journey of becoming a nun and expressed that it wasn't a choice, it was simply her path. She shared the uplifting and challenging aspects of her experience in retreat for 11 years and expressed the importance of dedicating time to heal and improve mental health activity. Lama Zangmo explained that dedicating her body, mind and spirit to serving the Buddhist teachings and for the greater good, meant everything to her.

They all shared the impact their faith has on their work and daily life. When asked how to promote harmony between people and faiths. Debora informed the audience of the African saying 'women are the start of humanity' explaining that women have the ability of creating understanding in a community. The speakers then shared their views in promoting gender equality, the importance of women connecting, supporting, and learning from each other.

To conclude the event, Executive Director of Edinburgh Interfaith Association, Iain Stewart thanked the panelists and explained that we all have the power to change, and to change the world we need role models for people to look up to and be inspired by.

click here to catch up

The Rev. Bonnie Evans-Hills receives Lambeth Award

UKWFN Coordinating Committee member Rev Bonnie Evans-Hills was honoured in the 2022 Lambeth Awards for her long-standing dedication to building interfaith relationships. The awards are given to people within the Church of England, the wider Anglican Communion, other Christian churches, as well as to those of other faiths and none. Bonnie received the Hubert Walter Award for Reconciliation, and Interfaith Cooperation from the Most Rev Justin Welby Archbishop of Canterbury on International Women's Day. The award was given for dedication to building interfaith relationships at local, national, and international level.





Religions for Peace World Council Statement on International Women's Day 2022

For the first time in the history of Religions for Peace, the World Council, the governing body of Religions for Peace, composed of senior most faith leaders representing faith communities around the world, has issued a statement on International Women's Day.

The World Council acknowledges that women are impacted most severely by today's multiple and simultaneous challenges of war, environmental degradation, violence, and poverty, committing to work together to support women's voices, leadership and needs globally.

learn more



Women in Religious Scriptures

How can they inspire and empower us today?

One of the strategic priorities of RfP UKWFN is to promote inspirational women from the past and present who can in turn can be role models for all. Therefore, RfP UKWFN organised and hosted the first 'Women in Religious Scriptures' event, with a panel of distinguished women scholars from the Muslim, Jewish and Baha'i religious traditions.

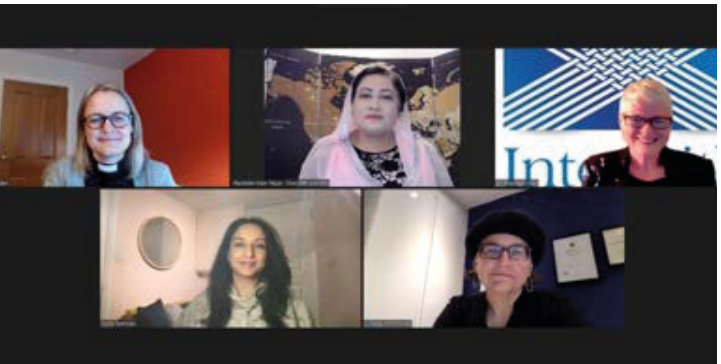
Our distinguished panel were Dr Sofia Rehman, an independent scholar and author specialising in Islam and Gender; Dr Lindsay Simmonds, researcher in Women of Faith and Peacebuilding at the Religion and Global Society Unit in the LSE and Research Fellow at the London School of Jewish Studies; and Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland.
Our speakers were warmly welcomed by Ravinder Kaur Nijjar before being interviewed by Jenny Ramsden who led our speakers in a discussion based on the following questions:

"Is there a particular woman in your religious scriptures who inspires you and how/why?"

"Which verses in your religious scriptures empower women and how?"

"How can we, as women of faith, challenge those who misuse religious scriptures to cause harm?"

All three of our speakers agreed that the women in their religious scriptures continue to inspire them today. Dr Lindsay shared the story of Ruth, and spoke about her agency, her loving-kindness, and her determination. Dr Sofia told us about Aisha, who was knowledgeable, eloquent, inquisitive, politically engaged, publicly visible and not afraid to hold authority to account. Dr Maureen spoke to us about Martha Root, who courageously travelled far and wide to spread her message of peace and unity.

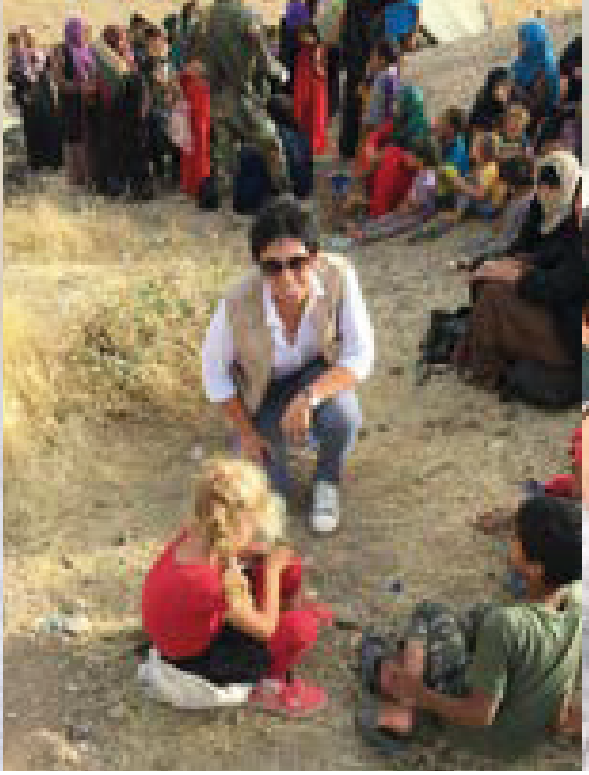


Our speakers were also united in their belief that their religious scriptures empower women. Dr Sofia shared verses which demonstrate that men and women are equal before God and that gender justice is at the heart of the Qur'an. Dr Maureen highlighted verses from her sacred text with the imperative to educate women and spoke about how these verses had been liberating for her personally in encouraging her to return to higher education as an adult. Dr Lindsay shared verses from her religious scriptures that demonstrate that women should always have the right to consent, to be in an equal partnership, and to be named, heard, and taken seriously.

The overwhelming response of our speakers to the question of how we as women of faith can challenge those who misuse religious scripture to cause harm was "Know your scriptures". They also spoke of the importance of having confidence as women - both in terms of our ability to seek out scriptures on our own terms, guided by our hearts, and in terms of having the confidence to speak out against injustice. And all our speakers were inspired by Dr Lindsay's injunction "Don't threaten to leave, threaten to stay".

It was a truly enlightening evening for all participants, who were not only empowered by our speakers affirming that women in all faiths are given equal status, but also inspired to challenge anyone who might say otherwise.

click here to catch up


Human Rights Day Helen Mayer Memorial Lecture Keynote Speaker Sally Becker

Religions for Peace UK together with UKWFN were honoured to welcome humanitarian Sally Becker as the keynote speaker for our Human Rights Day Helen Mayer Memorial Lecture.

Our evening began with the Chair of Religions for Peace UK, Cinde Lee, reminding us that Human Rights Day marks the backbone of our undertakings as Religions for Peace UK, as Human Rights is one of the cornerstones of peace. Cinde shared how Helen Mayer, one of the major benefactors of Religions for Peace, was an integral part of the pioneering workforce at the beginning of the Religions for Peace movement and someone who was passionate about peace. Helen Mayer is remembered as a remarkable woman in her lifetime and an inspiring UK Women of Faith Network role model, and so, as Cinde remarked, it was very fitting to hear the trailblazing story of Sally Becker in her honour.

We then had the privilege of hearing Sally share her remarkable story, which has covered decades through hardships and dangers upholding the rights of children in conflict zones.

Sally began by sharing what inspired her to make her initial journey to Bosnia, where she became known as 'The Angel of Mostar' after rescuing wounded children and their families from besieged hospitals. She spoke of her return to the Balkans during the war in Kosovo, and of how she was captured by Serb paramilitaries while taking injured children across the mountains to safety. She told us how she rescued injured children in Iraq despite being caught in a chemical attack by ISIS.

Finally, Sally shared how, with the support from RfPUK she organised the evacuation of over 200 orphaned children from the conflict zones in Ukraine when war broke out earlier this year. Those present were left awestruck at the courage and bravery that Sally showed in such dangerous and devastating situations. When asked if she had a message for the participants to take away from hearing her story, Sally responded that she would like us all to remember that we can make a difference, however small, even by knocking on the door of someone who is lonely or smiling at someone so that they know they are not alone.

click here to view the lecture

Her Magesty Queen Elizabeth II: A Woman of Faith Dedicated to a Lifetime of Service

This year was the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and RfP UKWFN celebrated the occasion by organizing two interfaith picnics, one in Glasgow in partnership with Interfaith Scotland and the other in London jointly with RfP UK Inter-faith Youth Network.



We were much saddened by the later unfortunate news of Her Majesty's death. Her steadfast service to our nation will be remembered as we seek to render service to our community and beyond. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, was deeply honoured to be invited to the Thanksgiving Service for Her Majesty the Queen at St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh. It was a sad but spiritual, serene, dignified, and peaceful service. A fitting tribute to a remarkable woman who selflessly served her nation and beyond for decades.





London Platinum Jubilee Picnic

The London Platinum Jubilee Picnic took place in Regents Park with our own UK Interfaith Youth Network. A quintessentially British event - with overcast skies and rain threatening, but nothing could dampen the warm and joyful atmosphere of our picnic attended by people of all ages from 5 to 65! There were six different faiths represented, many people brought food to share. RfP UKWFN Coordinating Committee member Karen Maxwell's shavuot cheesecake crowned the event and was enjoyed by many. RfP Youth Coordinator Eda Molla Chousein gave a short speech about the Queen making specific reference to Her Majesty's deep commitment to faith and supporting people of the many faiths.

It was a lovely way to bring people together to express our support and gratitude to our monarch who has set the most amazing example of service and dedication to her community- she is a beacon of hope & unity, a wonderful moment to celebrate our shared values of love and humanity.

Glasgow Interfaith Family Picnic event with Interfaith Scotland and Thank you Day

On a beautifully hot Sunday after-noon people from diverse faiths and countries came together to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's seven dec-ades of service and gave thanks for her dedication.

Organised by Interfaith Scotland in partnership with Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network and Thank you Day 60 adults and over 16 children from Muslim, Sikh, Chris-tian, Baha'i, Hindu, and Buddhist communities came together to share food, reflect on service, peace and gratitude. Diverse countries were represented including Africa Turkey Kurdistan India and of course the UK. Several organisations such as 'Freedom from Torture' brought refugees families and Kidney Research UK joined us at the picnic.

There was plenty of music, improvised drumming using a chair instead of a tabla, lots of laughter, craft activities for children, games and great conversation.

Dr Maureen Sier director of Interfaith Scotland welcomed everyone and spoke of gratitude to the Queen for her service through seven decades. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar shared the contribution of the Queen as a woman of faith and women in general that their contribution to society needs to be recognised. They need to be given the opportunity to develop their potential religiously, socially, culturally, educationally, and politically and that all women should be treated as royalty and given the respect and love that they all deserve.

Frances Hume, the National Development Officer of Interfaith Scotland then concluded the presentations by giving us all a glimpse into the life of the Queen and her decades of service. The rest of the afternoon was spent eating, sharing, singing and having great fun together!


Kidney


Interfaith
Scotland



WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women, Empowerment, Dialogue and Peace project was started using the 'Dignity of Women-Scriptural Reflections Exhibition, discussion and workshops. The project aims to educate religious and secular communities on the role and status of women within the Sacred Texts of the World's Religions and in turn help to overcome the misrepresentation and discrimination of women; empower women using scriptural knowledge to challenge the misuse of religious scripture; and through group work promote interfaith dialogue.

The first event was held in November during Interfaith Week in the UK. The women felt that viewing the exhibition and taking part in the discussion helped them distinguish between what had been passed down and taught to them from a cultural perspective and what the scriptures taught from a faith perspective. Participants said that understanding the difference between faith and culture was potentially and incredibly empowering for them moving forwards, in terms of challenging some of the issues they face within their communities.

16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence

This year UKWFN took part in the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. This is an annual international campaign that begins on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women until 10 December, Human Rights Day.

Gender-Based Violence is a societal issue men and women need to challenge it whenever and wherever it occurs. For 16 days we took action by bringing the issue of Gender-Based Violence to the forefront by posting on social media every day. This year we invited male Allies who supported us in advancing our cause and are honoured to present a video series called "Visible Advocacy – Interfaith Male Allies in our Midst". We offer our sincere thanks to our esteemed male Allies who each spoke out unequivo-cally against Gender-Based Violence using quotes from their Sacred Scriptures, and who were united in their call for all men and boys to speak up, act, and challenge any form of violence against women and girls.

Our posts were a combination of the videos from Male Allies, quotes from our 'Dignity of Women' exhibition referencing the positive status of women in sacred scriptures, and links to a radio show, the 'Women in Religious Scriptures' event and the 'Dignity of Women' booklet. The Radio Show was commissioned especially for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, and Jenny Ramsden, were guests alongside Abda Khan - lawyer turned au-thor, domestic abuse support worker and British Muslim Woman of the Year 2019, and Simon Phillips - Ambassador for the White Ribbon Campaign, which aims to mobilise men and boys to stand up against violence against women and girls.

The discussion addressed the issues and challenges facing women experiencing Gender-Based Violence; Toxic Masculinity; 'Honour'; the invaluableness of knowing what the different Sacred Scriptures teach about the dignity and equality of women; the importance of faith communities coming together to challenge Gender-Based Violence and how to challenge Gender-Based Violence in practice both as individuals and faith communities.

Follow this link to watch our male allies on YouTube.

The Dignity of Women – Scriptural Reflections Resource

During the 16 Days of Activism, we shared quotes from the Sacred Scriptures of the dif-ferent world religions that highlight the pos-itive status and equality of women. These quotes form part of our 'The Dignity of Women – Scriptural Reflections' exhibition. It is hoped this exhibition, and the accom-panying booklet, will educate religious and secular communities on the role and status of women and in turn help to overcome the misrepresentation of and discrimination against women.

Follow this link to read our booklet and be empowered to challenge those who misuse scripture to harm women in any way.

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Oneness - A Tree Planting and Conservation Event, Glasgow

UKWFN honoured to work with EcoSikh UK, The Conservation volunteers (TCV) and Interfaith Glasgow on World Sikh Environment Day.

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar said, "Working together to let Earth breathe by planting trees and restoring biodiversity is imperative if our planet is going to be sustainable for generations to come."

Humanity needs to work together to help mitigate the climate crisis. Nature provides us with the solutions of solar, wind and wave power. But the lungs of the planet, trees, provide us with the oxygen that living things need to exist and capture the carbon that is polluting our environment. Trees like women are the foundation stone and the fabric of society, they provide and nurture for the good of all.



Let Earth Breathe, Plant Trees Project

Planting a Tree of Peace at Glasgow University

On a wet Tuesday afternoon on 6 September 2022 UKWFN in partnership with University of Glasgow Inter-faith Chaplaincy held a ceremony celebrating the planting of a 'Tree of Peace'. The tree was planted in March 2022 but due to Covid the dedication ceremony could not be held at the time. This is a continuation of the project led by UKWFN 'Let Earth Breathe, Plant Trees'. The project is a simple concrete method whereby individuals, families, schools, universities, places of worship, businesses etc, plant a symbolic 'Tree of Peace' helping to negate carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere but also leading to discussions and concrete actions as to what can be done individually and collectively.

Joined by the Vice Principal Professor Ian McInnes, the Religion and Belief Champion, chaplains, students, and members of different faith communities Dr Rev. Carolyn Kelly Chaplain at Glasgow University welcomed everyone speaking of the Tree of Life in the Christian tradition with twelve kinds of fruit for each month for all the times and seasons of the year and the leaves of the tree it says offer the healing of the nations.

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar outlined the project and spoke of the importance of planting trees and their significance in different religions. She spoke about the Miyawaki methodology of planting trees in a small area resulting in fully grown forests within 2 years restoring biodiversity in the area.

She encouraged the University to carry out a pilot project using this method. The Vice Principal of Glasgow University Professor McInnes spoke of the commitment of the University to tackle the climate crisis. Glasgow many years ago was one of the first Universities to lead with a green city concept and working together we can make a difference.

Ravinder then concluded that Religions for Peace UK had established a Peace Grove through the Trees for Life in Scotland. The Grove forms part of the "Let Earth Breathe, Plant trees" project. Those who cannot plant a tree themselves can add to the Peace Grove using this link

Participants were encouraged to plant Trees of Peace individually and collectively, and we extended invitations to all to further discuss what action we can take to mitigate climate change.





Manresa 2022 Pact: Multireligious and multisectoral Global Pact For the Development Of Resilient, Sustainable, Safe and Inclusive Cities

Manresa is in Spain, located close to Barcelona, right at the doorstep to the famous Monserrat. 2022 is the year the people of Manresa celebrate 500th anniversary of St Ignatius of Loyola's visit to the city en-route to Jerusalem, during which he went through a thorough conversion of his whole being, his impact on spirituality, personal values and peace continues to be relevant throughout the world today.

Our cities are in crisis. Inequality and discrimination transform what could be sites of human flourishing into pockets of social stratification and exclusion, many cities are seized by modes of consumption and development that contributes to pollution and climate change while leaving the most marginalised and vulnerable to the consequences of environmental and mental degradation. We are compelled to take another path, and St Ignatius's total transformation 500 years ago is a timely reminder that change is always possible.

True peace, dialogue, and social commitment continue to be at the heart of all the religious traditions of the world. The keys of transformation are relationships and collaboration between different actors of life, requiring religious, governmental, and non-governmental actors to work together for better ways forward. The signing of the pact between our youth, government and non-government actors lays the foundation to seeking common good, tis is a commendable effort, and one that more cities may find useful to join up for the long term shared securities for city-dwellers from all walks of life.

The Manresa 2022 Forum started by identifying the crises and examined the role of interfaith partnerships in the midst of the difficulties. RfPUK participated in the delivering solutions segment of the Conference. RfPUK Chair Cinde Lee deliberated on "Visionary Teaching: Sharing Ways Faith Communities Can Offer Solutions by Working Together". Examples of faith communities working in the UK bringing positive results, raising awareness on environmental issues, gender-based violence, refugees reception all form parts of our work.

The Forum was an opportunity to learn about each other's progress, find out how we can find areas to collaborate, and how religious communities can work together to solve problems that span across nations and regions, where international co-operation is necessary and vital.

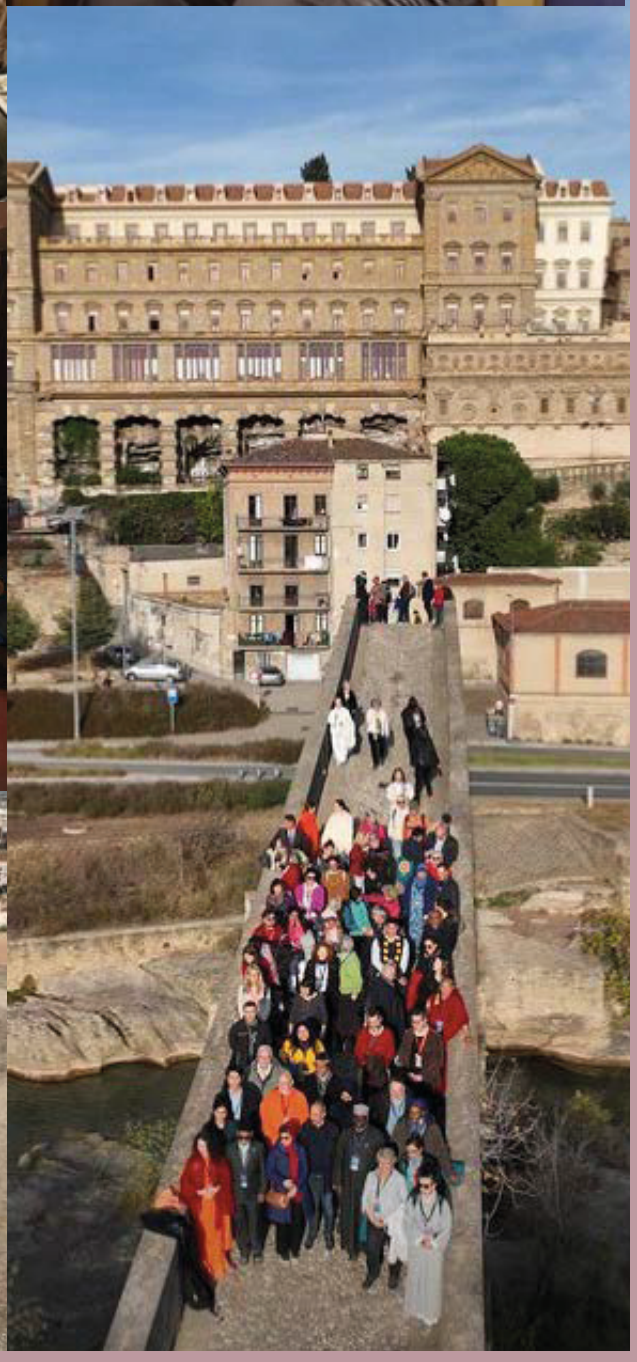
This is an ongoing task, the Religions for Peace Movement will contribute with one programme at a time, sign the pact with one city at a time, citing the Manresa 2022 Multi-religious and Multi-sectoral Global Pact as a blueprint to bring urban areas new and old to develop resilient, sustainable, safe, and inclusive cities.

The Manresa Pact 2022


Sra. Cinde Lee.











LOOKING FORWARD

In the coming year, we will continue with our project to empower women using the toolkit being developed to use with the Dignity of Women-Scriptural Reflections booklet and continue building male interfaith allies to challenge gender-based violence.

We hope to go beyond empowerment and train facilitators within faith communities to use the toolkit. We will continue our work in educating communities on women in religious scriptures and highlighting the work of inspirational women past and present.

RfP UKWFN will work towards peaceful harmonious societies and improving religious literacy building trust and friendship between communities. Our work in protecting the environment will continue using advocacy and practical projects at the local level.



We hope that you and your community will join us in taking on our priorities forward within the UK, Europe and worldwide. Learning to see the world as one home for the one human family will continue to enlighten and encourage us to work together.

We thank our friends and supporters for their contribution. Let us engage people of all faiths and none through collaborative action towards the common good and create a better, peaceful world for future generations.

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

Religions *for* Peace
UK WOMEN OF FAITH NETWORK

COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar| Sikh (Chair)
Karen Maxwell | Jewish
Sr Brigid Collins | Christian
Varsha Dodhia | Jain
Harsha Shukla | Hindu
Olivia Fuchs | Buddhist
Rev. Bonnie Evan-Hills | Christian
Dr Lakshmi Vyas | Hindu
Rashidat Hassan | Muslim
Bilikisu Savage | Muslim
Georgina Long | Brahma Kumaris
Dr Karishma Kavita Koka | Zoroastrian
Cinde Lee | RfPUK Chair

LINKTREES

UK Women of Faith Network

Religions for Peace UK

UK Interfaith Youth Network