

Religions for Peace
UK Women of Faith Network

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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 organisations 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

CONTENTS

4 *A message from our Chair*

6 *Spirituality & mental health interfaith*

8 *Harmony week*

9 *Women & leadership*

14 *Protecting the environment*

18 *COP26*

A MESSAGE

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



At the beginning of 2021 we all had high hopes that we would be able to return to normality, but the lockdown continued, and we were faced with work and family challenges. I am indebted to the Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Coordinating Committee members for their dedication and commitment to lead and assist with Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network (UKWFN) events via social media and taking our work forward. A heartfelt thank you all, particularly to Karen Maxwell for working with me as part of the Core Group and Cinde Lee for her hard work in managing communications on Facebook, other social media outlets and in helping to produce the annual report.

INTRODUCTION

Although 2021 has proven to be continuously challenging to the world, Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network work had taken on the challenges and necessary adaptation in the face of the pandemic with its many limitations and restrictions. Meetings by Zoom remained a main platform for our communications and community reach, while plans to return to face-to-face events were never far from our agenda.

UKWFN activities took on three main areas in the past year: Spirituality and Mental Health, Women in Leadership, and Protecting the Envi-ronment leading onto the UN Climate Conference COP26 which took place in Glasgow in November 2021.

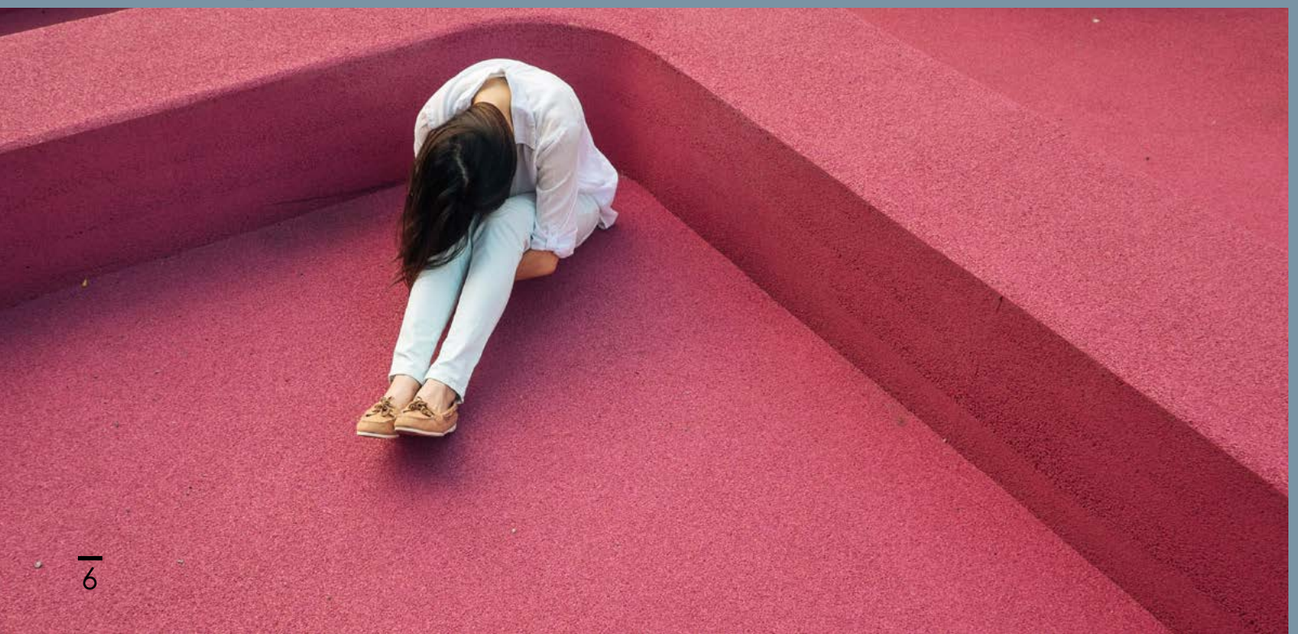
In this report, we present our continuous efforts throughout the year, our interpolating activities gave focus to the issues we address. We also re-count the long preparation and run up to COP26 and its aftermath, the fruits we reached and our plans for the future to keep focus on the urgent climate crisis issue affecting the whole of humanity.

UKWFN reaches out to multi faith and interfaith women's organisations as well as to the wider community without any religious affiliation. We call upon women to assume leadership roles to contribute towards a better and peaceful future. We are a platform where organisations and in-dividuals can connect to effect development and improvement. We welcome co-operation, collaboration and encour-age joint efforts with organisations with which we share common goals.

Together we are stronger, together we are better, together we can achieve the impossible!

SPIRITUALITY & MENTAL HEALTH

After successive lockdowns in the UK, during 2020 going into January 2021, it became evident to RfP UKWFN that people's mental health was inevitably suffering. The dual effect of accumulated worry due to the pandemic's physical im-pact on people's lives, and the fact that they were separated from their communities or normal support networks, presented a clear need.



The Positive Mind Event Series

UKWFN decided to hold a series of weekly events with a dual purpose: to learn from two women of faith each week on what in their scriptures and personal practice helps them keep a positive mind; and to provide a safe space for participating women to meet and support each other. Our first event in this "Spiritual Vibrations" series was on the 21st of January, and we ran weekly gatherings on Zoom until the end of March. Trialing with a small group of participants of around 5, we quickly reached groups of 25-40, many of whom returned each week.

We heard reflections and prayers from women representing the following faiths and tradi-tions: Christian, Baha'i, Hindu, Jain, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Interfaith, Humanist, Sikh, Zoroastrian, Druid/Pagan and Brahma Kumaris.

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar (Sikh) spoke on keeping a positive mind through faith and Georgina Long (Brahma Kumaris) on the power of silence. Carolyn Kelly (Christian) presented her focus on acknowledging reality and Olivia Fuchs (Buddhist) on fusing body and mind through transforming energy.

Frances Hume (Interfaith) shared her daily spiritual life whilst Sister Isabel Smyth (Catholic) spoke on the energy of prayer. Nasim Azad (Muslim) talked about our shared common responsibility and Mandy Evans-Ewing (Humanist) on how to keep a positive mindset.

Varsha Dodhia (Jain) concentrated on nonviolence throughout the day and Dr Maureen Sier (Baha'i) on faith, family, friends and for-aging. The final two speakers Linda Haggerstone (Druid) shared the practice of the Sacred Earth Path and the worship of love and life, and Dr. Karishma Koka (Zoroastri-an) on faith and neuroscience.

Due to the success and feeling of positivity, and the spiritual vibrations we felt during these events, UKWFN decided to share prayers on our new Youtube channel: so that others could benefit from the prayers and advice offered from multiple faiths and cultural traditions.

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Celebrating World Interfaith Harmony Week

Nurturing the Mind Through Spirituality

For World Interfaith Harmony Week 2021, UKWFN organised a topical event centred on spirituality and mental health. Psychologist Sunna Kaleem spoke on the topic of "Spirituality in Today's World". Through detailed slides, personal and professional reflections, Sunna artfully led us through the significance of spirituality to mental health, and how this is backed up by science. She told us about "Alpha state" and how faith, belief or practice aids this, through structure, direction, intention, knowing there is something bigger outside of ourselves and our perception, sense of peace, wholeness and balance and connection to our community.

Professor John Swinton, professor in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care, and Chair of Divinity and Religious Studies at the University of Aberdeen added to the debate, by outlining why the distinction between religious and scientific healing is unnecessary. He clarified a distinction between those who are intrinsically and extrinsically faithful: and argued that statistically the intrinsically faithful (those who make sense of the world through their faith) enjoy a longer life expectancy. He also discussed what is unique and necessary about religious communities to their members.

Rita Docherty, Vice Chair of Interfaith Scotland, and lecturer in Counselling at Borders College outlined the importance of the principles of care, compassion and love which help people of faith sustain positive mental health. She also gave practical advice on supporting a person of faith, showing us how self-awareness and loving kindness nurtured by spirituality can train the brain to seek the positive.



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WOMEN & LEADERSHIP

It has long been recognised that women are incredible achievers in our very complex world. UKWFN decided 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 celebrations went beyond singing praises and offering congratulations to them, our speakers shared their life stories, their struggles, challenges, and their viewpoints from both personal and social perspectives. We are indeed very proud to report on these events.



International Women's Day

Celebrating Inspirational Women

International Women's Day offers us a chance each year to celebrate and investigate the re-markable contribution of women to improv-ing society and the quality of people's lives. In recognition of women's contributions to peace, equality, and to the society at large, we were joined by three truly remarkable women for this event: Laura Marks OBE, interfaith activist, consultant and founder of Mitzvah Day, Dr Maureen Sier, global interfaith leader, scholar and Director of Interfaith Scotland, and Trishna Singh OBE, Director of Sikh Sanjog and Punjabi Junction Social En-terprise.

Through the warm and personable interviewing by Karen Maxwell, the speakers discussed the following areas: what motivated them to start on their path of social activism, what examples from their faith or cultural background have inspired them, how their faith empowers them, and which issues women need to address to progress on the path to equality.

Through asking questions which concentrated on the personal and spiritual motivations behind change making, the interviews were able to investigate the similarities of our speakers' experience. We observed striking similarities in the barriers and criticism they faced, which surpassed cultural differences. They all seek to address inequalities and social justice, and shared what is at the heart of their faith and cultural tradition which motivates them to challenge the status quo.

During our Q&A, when asked for advice for the next generation of change-makers, our speakers encouraged us to keep building community, and not be taken aback from being considered "trouble-makers". No matter what background you come from, that is a criticism women will inevita-bly face when we seek to level the playing field and carve a more equal future for all.

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The first Inspirational Women event w as so successful that UKWFN decided to take this theme further. A second "Inspirational Women" event took place on 25th May 2021.

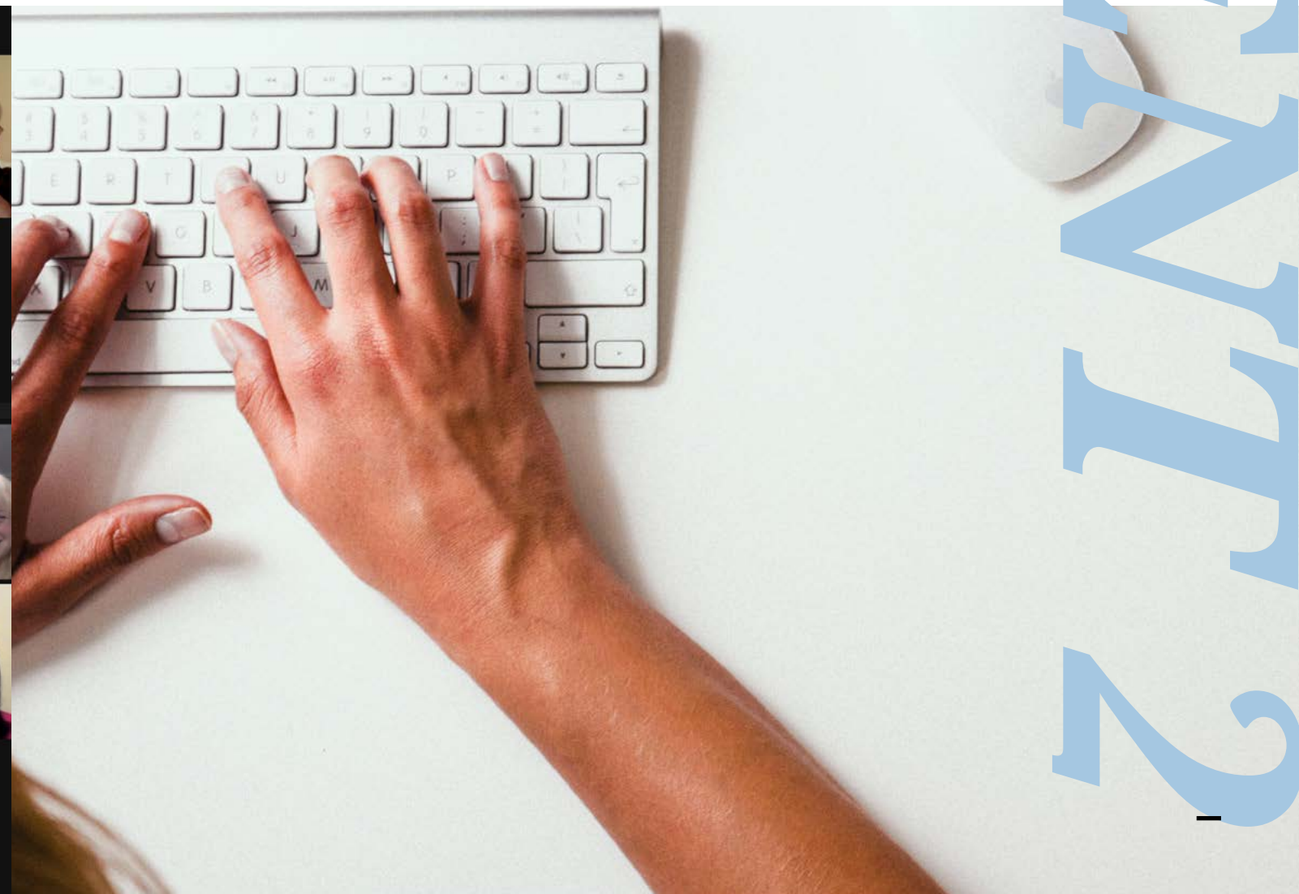
Expertly moderated by UKWFN Coordinating Committee member Karen Maxwell, this discussion took place on Zoom with over 50 registrants. How does faith and culture both offer us obstacles to, and bring us the strength to fight for, equality? Our guests shared their life stories, how they embarked upon their path, and what barriers they faced.

Karen Maxwell asked open questions such as "which women have inspired you on your path?" We heard from Umutesi Stewart Speaker, nurse and survivor of the Rwandan Genocide. She shared her incredibly moving story of watching the murder of her family, and how strong women in her community and on her path to safety inspired her, and showed her the strength of the human spirit.

Zara Mohammed, the first female Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, told us about how she was endlessly inspired by her mother: her down to earth and practical attitude, combined with the motivation to create positive change. Sister Isabel Smyth OBE, Founding Director of Interfaith Scotland and Catholic Bishops' Secretary for Inter-religious Dialogue, told us all about the strong women of faith she lives with, who build community and shared her spiritual path, and how they are united by their common motivation to equality and justice.

It was an honour for all participants to hear about the inspiring lives of these women from three different generations, and how they have overcome the barriers they faced.

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TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In November, the Religions for Peace Dignity of Women-Scriptural Reflections Exhibition was displayed at an event organised by the Reverend Canon Councillor Ann Easter from the Forum of Faiths of Newham Council and the Mayor's Commissioner for Inter Faith Dialogue. The event discussed the issue of violence against women and girls, especially in faith settings and from a faith perspective. Participants were surprised by the similarities of the verses on the honour and status of women from different religious scriptures and a rich discussion ensued.

Statement released by International Women's Coordinating Committee of the Religions for Peace Global Women of Faith Network on Overcoming Violence Against Women

On the 30th anniversary of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, Religions for Peace International Women's Coordinating Committee called upon governments and intergovernmental organisations to use a whole society approach to prevent and combat violence against women.

The statement was issued to religious Institutions and faith-based communities to raise systematic and systemic awareness about GBV, and the means to identify, report, heal and prevent such atrocities.



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

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Sacred Earth, Sacred People

With the urgent need for attention to the pressing issue of climate change, UKWFN started addressing the need to learn more about the damage to the climate, discuss how we could counter the havoc caused by humans, and plan future joint actions we could take as peoples of faith. We undertook webinars and discussions, reflected amongst the participants regarding what each other's communities were doing, and as we approached COP26, we supported other organisations in reaching out to our Network so that we could stay informed, inspired, and committed.

During COP26 UKWFN assumed an active role participating in various aspects such as the Global Climate Justice March, conferences and webinars. We connected and networked with many new and old friends for this common cause. We also worked with Religions for Peace International who hosted an official side event and issued an International Women of Faith Statement from women of diverse faiths, beliefs and traditions, from different countries around the world, bringing a collective voice to COP26.



Protecting the earth

Earth Hour Campaign

In support of WWF Scotland and their Earth Hour Campaign, UKWFN held a dedicated weekly session to reflect on the environment. Beginning with reflections and prayers on the earth and our relation to it, which created a relaxed, spiritual atmosphere, from where the entire event flowed naturally.

Mandy Evans Ewing shared with us a reflection from a Humanist perspective and read a moving prayer on tuning in to the cycles of nature. She called us to transcend our differences, as the earth is home for all of us, and we need to honour our planet and protect it through practical means. Then Linda Haggerstone shared with us her reflection from a Druid perspective: on respecting trees, seas, and bees practically. She looked to the four elements, the breath in her, and told us of the interconnectedness at the heart of Druid philosophy.

Lexi Parfitt, Head of Communications and Fundraising at WWF Scotland, delivered an expert presentation on the extent of the climate emergency, its effect on human rights and women around the world, why faith groups are motivated to create change in this area, what the Earth Hour Campaign is, and how we can all get involved. We finished with a Q&A session, and all felt energised on how we can transcend our differences to protect the planet.

Our final speaker Zarina Ahmed is a climate change communicator and PhD researcher at University of Manchester. She shared with us the role of religion and faith for environmental activism and gave examples of the inspiring, hardworking women who are engaged in environmental projects at the grassroots level. Zarina mentioned the importance of collective and individual action and the significance of bringing secular and faith communities together to collaborate in environmental causes. Participants then shared ideas and actions that they have carried out to protect the Earth.

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Spiritual Vibrations: Global Action Day

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UKWFN supported the Global Day of Action for our sacred earth and climate justice. We gathered as a part of a global multifaith day of action, with 120 organisations standing with us from all faiths and spiritual backgrounds. Participants were equally as diverse, sharing prayers, verses and meditations from different faiths. UKWFN Chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar outlined the 10 demands of the "Sacred People, Sacred Earth" document, including a just and equitable transition to renewable energy, and welcome to climate refugees.

Speakers from eight diverse faiths shared prayers and verses on the environment. Harsha Shukla and Dr Lakshmi Vyas presented from the Hindu faith first, highlighting the teaching that all the universe is one family, outlining the meaning of Ahimsa, and reading together from the Bhagavad Gita that Lord Krishna says he is present in all beings.

We then heard from Rebecca Bellamy about the earth from the Quaker perspective. She read excerpts from the Book of Discipline for Quakers, which brought forward the understanding that we do not own the earth, but with increasing power must come an increasing reverence for life.

Olivia Fuchs highlighted the Buddhist principle of the interconnectedness of all life, through quotes from Buddhist activists in-cluding Joanna Macy, the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh (who taught we need a collective enlightenment to stop the destruction of the earth), and Daisaku Ikeda, from Olivia's own tradition of Soka Gakkai Japanese Buddhism.

Ahimsa is a concept shared between our Hin-du presenters and Varsha Dodhia, who presented from the Jain tradition. She said

"The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed"

She outlined the principle of individual responsibility, in a 2,600 years old prayer from the Jain scriptures, and recited in Prakrit language.

We heard from Amandeep Kaur from EcoSikhs, on the Sikh principle of Ik Onkar, or oneness of all things. She read various verses from the Guru Granth Sahib, which uses metaphors of nature to teach us how to live, and examples of sustainable living and practice of faith throughout Sikh history.

Our next presenter was JoAnn Sproule from the Coexist Foundation, she read a heartfelt prayer on her hopes for Christians to use their position of power for good and return to equality and justice at the heart of Christian teachings. Her work advocates compassion to those experiencing the effects of ecocide and she aims to join peoples of all faiths and none in solidarity to the oppressed and the planet we all share, and to lift our voices in protest, to use our resources, strength and knowledge.

From the Muslim faith, we heard next from Linsay Taylor from the Muslim Council of Scotland. She outlined the concept of guardianship in the Qur'an and Hadiths. She explained the principle of modesty in all things, and how Islam discourages greed and excess, even when there's an abundance. Islam encourages positive action: a principle shared by our last presenter, Karen Maxwell, who explained the concept of Tikkun Olam in Judaism (repairing the earth). She explained the position of her tradition, Progressive Judaism, to behave and act constructively and spiritually towards social justice and the environment.

The beautiful diversity of faiths and spiritual approaches towards climate justice was not just present in the presenters during this event, but also the attendees who referenced each other's traditions, there was an empowering feeling of warmth and genuine interest and respect of the "other". In fact, we all celebrated our immense similarities, our common aims, and dreams for the future of our planet.





UN CLIMATE CONFERENCE

COP26 Glasgow

In November 2021 thousands of people came together in Glasgow, world leaders, scientists, politicians, delegations from different countries, people of faith, indigenous people, all share a common goal to stop global temperatures rising and to protect the planet. Faith and community organisations in Scotland, in UK and throughout the world had been preparing for months for this world changing global conference.

Many events and activities took place before and over the two weeks organised by faith and interfaith and secular organisations.

Expectations of delegates were high, things needed to change so that humanity could survive on Planet Earth. The World Leaders Summit started with a pledge from 130 countries to end deforestation by 2030 but the crucial part of eradicating the use of fossil fuels was not achieved. There was a sombre call from Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley speaking out for islands facing catastrophe. World leaders needed to act now, how could one third of the world watch while two thirds of the suffered and drowned due to climate change.

Making Peace with Nature

Heeding the Call of Indigenous People

Religious leaders affirmed their commitment at COP26 to safeguard the rights of indigenous peoples and to solve the climate and deforestation crisis. On 3rd November, Religions for Peace International, the UN and partners hosted the "Making Peace with Nature: Heeding the Call of Indigenous People" side event at COP26. The event, co-organised with the World Council of Churches, the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church, and supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), explored how and why it is necessary to protect indigenous peoples rights and spiritualities to achieve the goals of the Paris climate agreement.

Dr. Charles McNeill, Senior Advisor on Forests and Climate, United Nations Environment Programme moderated the event which was opened by Prof. Azza Karam, Secretary General of Religions for Peace International, she highlighted the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI) as a powerful example of religious leaders mobilising to protect tropical rainforests and the rights of indigenous peoples.

Mr. Andreas Dahl-Jørgensen, Director of the Norwegian International Climate and Forest Initiative announced the Government of Norway would continue their support of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative for the coming three years.

Dr. Tom Clements, Strategic Policy Advisor to the Secretary of State and Lord Goldsmith of the United Kingdom, highlighted the strong commitment of the UK as President of the COP to put the forests and indigenous peoples agenda at the heart of the climate discussion and to deliver on the Glasgow Leaders Declaration on Forests and Land Use, a historic commitment that represents one of the most significant outcomes of COP26. He further highlighted that a coalition of 14 governments and private donors are committing US$1.7 billion specifically to support indigenous peoples over the next 5 years.

Reverend Mari Valjakka, Pastor of Sámi at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and Moderator of the Indigenous Peoples Reference Group of the World Council of Churches (WCC), highlighted that "our land is sacred to us, it gives us life and shelter, it is our home and our church. We have a connection to the land and wisdom to share, but our knowledge has been devalued. We think that indigenous perspectives are crucial not only for addressing the climate emergency but also for navigating the way forward to a hopeful post-COVID, post-growth and post-fossil-fuel future."

UKWFN Chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar was honoured to speak at the event and highlighted that a Women of Faith Statement was recently produced by women faith leaders around the world, affirming their commitment to work with the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative and recognising that there is no solution to the climate crisis without protecting the rainforests and its indigenous peoples. She added that "women have been the caretakers of our environment across all cultures and, particularly, indigenous women have nourished our biodiversity and ecosystems and recognize that all forms of life are sacred. We, as custodians of the planet, cannot allow the destruction and devastation of life."



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Welcoming Pilgrims to Glasgow

Pilgrims from Germany, Holland, Poland, Sweden, the UK and Scotland after having walked thousands of miles to reach Glasgow were welcomed by the Sikh community into the Gurdwara, the Sikh place of worship. The pilgrims then shared Guru Nanak's langar, a free vegetarian meal that is given to anyone visiting the Gurdwara and were honoured with gifts.

The Action Hub

The Action Hub with Planet Earth high above the arena was a hive of activity where people connected, networked, and could have their voice heard globally through the media that lined the perimeter of the hub.



COP26 Multi-Faith Prayer Vigil in Glasgow City Centre

On Sunday 31st October hundreds of people attended the multi-faith COP26 Prayer Vigil in George Square, Glasgow. Senior religious leaders including UKWFN Chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar read the Glasgow Multi-Faith Declaration for COP26 and led prayers from a diversity of religious traditions.

More than 50 Scottish and UK religious leaders signed a declaration calling on governments to take transformational climate action at COP26. The Glasgow Multi-Faith Declaration called for those in power to put the 2015 Paris Agreement into effect. Olivia Fuchs and Bonnie Evan-Hills, members of UKWFN Coordinating Committee were also present at the vigil.



United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) Interfaith Liaison Committee Talanoa Dialogue

At Garnethill Synagogue, Glasgow religious leaders from 10 different religions gathered for an interfaith service and Talanoa dialogue session to share experiences and discuss ways forward as faith communities to support the continued efforts for mitigation of the global climate crisis. RfPUK Chair Jamie Cresswell and UKWFN Chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar took part in the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan workshop. More than 200 people attended the event onsite and online – which was intentionally modelled as an effort to ensure voices from all over the globe, and not just those able to physically be in Glasgow, could be heard.



Declarations and Petitions Handover Ceremony at Tron Church, Glasgow

In her capacity as a representative of the Scottish religious forum, UKWFN Chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar recited a prayer of commitment at the handover ceremony of all petitions and declarations at the Tron Church. She presented the Glasgow Multi-Faith Declaration for COP26 and the Global Women of Faith Statement for COP26 to the organisers.





Women faith leaders want global action

On Gender and Youth Day at COP26 was interviewed by Sky News, UKWFN Chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar spoke on the impact of the climate change on women and was honoured to publicise for the first time in the history of UN climate change conferences a statement by women of faith globally to denounce the destruction of the environment. The statement was produced by the RfP International Women's Coordinating Committee which comprises of women of faith networks, representing many regions and faith traditions in over 90 countries. She was also able to handover the Global Women of Faith Statement for COP26 statement to the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon as well as to His Royal Highness Prince Charles at the Glasgow Multi-faith Declaration.

The Global Women of Faith statement was published in the Scottish and faith media and was well received.

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Global Day March for Climate Justice

Glasgow came to a standstill as faith and belief groups gathered to call for climate justice. Over 100 000 people marched for climate justice trying to make their voices heard by world leaders and delegates at COP26. Faith and belief leaders and their communities, indigenous groups joined thousands of local, national, and international organisations calling for action to be taken now. Similar marches took place around the world.



Uniting Hearts to Heal the World

UKWFN Chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar took part in a collective meditation event organised by the Brahma Kumaris. Faith leaders and representatives shared meditations, or prayers for mother nature, for healing the heart and the well- being of people and the planet. Meditation was led by Sister Jayanti Kirpalani followed by representatives form Christian, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Bahai, Hinduism and Buddhist and Indigenous communities.



My Faith and the Environment – COP Aftermath

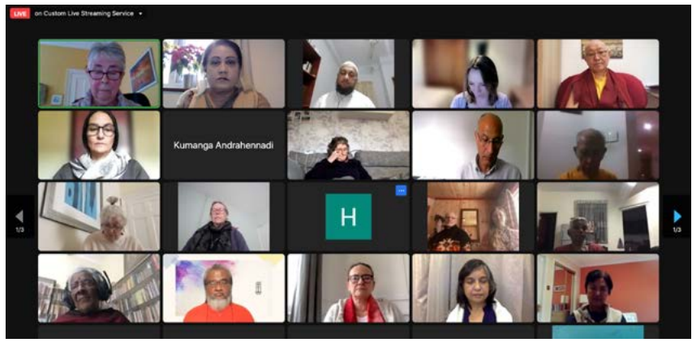
Religions for Peace UK Interfaith Youth Network organised a post COP26 event called "My Faith & the Environment" dedicated to the learnings from COP26 shared them through an Intergenerational Dialogue. UKWFN Chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar gave her reflections on COP26 and how we can work together. The mobilisation of people in and around Glasgow from all parts of the world was humbling but felt that the voice of faith communities raised through different events outside of COP26 was not heard inside the great machine. What was needed was to keep the momentum going and make world leaders accountable to take action immediately if catastrophe was to be averted for humanity especially for communities in the global South.

Other speakers included Don de Silva who spoke on 'The Relevance of the Glasgow Climate Pact to the World of Interfaith', Lucy Palmer on 'Reflections on Youth Voice in COP 26 Climate Policy Making Space', Matt Unerman on 'What Does Consumption Look Like in a Sustainable World?' and Nicole Travnicek on 'Following Up Glasgow Experience, How We Can Bring About Behaviour Change?'

Preventing and Mitigating Climate Crises - Through Mindfulness, Prayer and Spirituality

UKWFN Chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar was invited to speak at the inaugural meeting of a new faith-based environmental protection initiative took place at the end of November 2021 endorsed by the UN's Faith for Earth initiative and co-chaired by Dr Iyad Abumoghli Director of Faith for Earth, UN Environment Programme, Venerable Ringu Tulku Rinpoche, Founder of Bodhicharya International (Belgium) and Venerable U Dhammajiva, Abbot & Meditation Master, Nissaranavanaya Forest Monastery, Sri Lanka.

The forum consisting of spiritual and meditation masters, climate scientists, and spiritual ecologists from several countries will offer suggestions to mitigate and prevent the worsening of climate crises. The purpose of the forum is to raise awareness on the power of mindfulness, the value of meditation and collective prayer in reducing global warming, in mitigating damage and healing the planet.



Let Earth Breathe, Plant Trees, Restore Biodiversity

As part of the response of COP26, UKWFN launched the "Let Earth Breathe, Plant Trees, Restore Biodiversity" project. The event provided an opportunity to listen to three inspirational presenters from a faith and scientific perspective on the importance of t rees to help the climate crisis.

Karen Maxwell from the Board of Deputies of British Jews is founder member of Nisa Nashim and also UKWFN Coordinating Committee member. She presented on the topic of Tu Bi'shevat, which is the Jewish New Year specifically celebrating trees. She shared some text from the Jewish faith, highlighting the long-standing commitments that we must care for the environment and the responsibilities that come with it.

Dr. Leland Werden is a restoration ecologist at Crowther Lab, ETH Zurich and is also Director of Science at the Plant-for-Plant Foundation. He spoke about the importance of protecting and restoring ecological restoration and the benefits of w orking with local communities as well as sharing some projects he had carried out in communities. Dr. Leland stated that "tree planting can be incredible" when it's the "right tree in the right place". He concluded that it is economically more viable to preserve our existing forests than planting new ones, however due to years of deforestation we must plant new forests.

The Crowther Labs were one of the three finalists nominated for the 2021 Earthshot Prize instigated by His Royal Highness Prince William.

Our final speaker, Zarina Ahmed shared with us the role of religion and faith for environmental activism and gave examples of the inspiring, hardworking women who are doing environmental projects at the grassroots level. Similar to Dr Werden's presentation, Zarina also mentioned the importance of collective and individual action and the significance of bringing secular and faith communities together to collaborate in environmental causes.

UKWFN Chair Ravinder Kaur Nijjar announced the launch of Trees for Peace Grove at the gathering. Established by Religions for Peace UK through the Trees for Life in Scotland, our Grove forms a part of our "Let Earth Breathe, Plant trees" project. Those who cannot plant a tree themselves can add to the Peace Grove using the link below. 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.

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LOOKING FORWARD

Women have long been acknowledged as a formidable force of bringing compassion, service, and peace into the world. In the incredibly busy 2021, we have reached out to care, educate and advocate, working from our own spiritual convictions which motivate our actions towards making the world a better place for all.

In the coming year, our purpose and aim shall remain constant as we reach further into the communities to empower women, each to become a cornerstone in their community.

UKWFN will be furthering existing projects on protecting the Earth, instigating empowerment education efforts, as well as reaching out to promote mutual respect and understanding between communities. We will work towards peaceful harmonious societies fighting hate speech and improving religious literacy building trust and friendship.

We hope that our work will motivate you and your community to join us in taking on our priorities forward within the UK, Europe and worldwide. We hope our joint efforts will bring results to concerns that no one country can resolve by themselves. Learning to see the world as one home for the one human family will continue to enlighten and encourage us to work together. UKWFN values your input and participation, and hope to see you in our future activities.

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.

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
Karen Maxwell | Jewish
Georgina Long | Brahma Kumaris
Sr Brigid Collins | Christian
Varsha Dodhia | Jain
Harsha Shukla | Hindu
Olivia Fuchs | Buddhist
Rebecca Bellamy | Quaker
Rev. Bonnie Evan-Hills | Christian
Sophie Gregory | Bhaha'i
Dr Lakshmi Vyas | Hindu
Cinde Lee |RFPUK Trustee

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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.