



## MANILA, THE PHILIPPINES | LAUNCH OF RESTORING DIGNITY - RELIGIOUS YOUTH SAY NO TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

On 12 October 2011, *Religions for Peace* Global Interfaith Youth Network convened over 100 youth, religious leaders, and government representatives for the official launch of the new initiative, Restoring Dignity – Religious Youth Say No to Violence Against Women. The launch was held at the historic University of Santo Thomas in Manila, the Philippines, and was attended by spiritual and religious leaders including, **Dr. Lilian J. Sison**, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace* – Philippines, **Madame Lourdes V. Mastura**, President of Religions for Peace – Philippines, and **Rev. Kyoichi Sugino**, Assistant Secretary General of *Religions for Peace* – International.

The launch was moderated by **Ms. Lama Mahmoud Azab**, Member of *Religions for Peace* European Interfaith Youth Network, who presented the initiative and gave a stirring speech on why religious communities, and particularly religious youth, have the moral responsibility to say no to violence against women. Ms. Azab explained that religious principles of the world's major faiths affirm the position of religion as a force for human dignity and mandate that women be respected and valued in society. Ms. Azab also explained that violence against women and girls is a direct assault on the positive vision of peace that is central to each respective religious tradition.

After her introduction, Ms. Azab invited a representative from the four pilot countries to speak about the issues regarding violence against women in their country and how they plan to implement the initiative. **Ms. Soher el Sukaria**, Secretary General of the Arabic- Muslim Society of Cordoba and member of the Argentina Global Interfaith Youth Network, spoke about machismo in Argentina, which is defined as the attitude of superiority of men over women and of practices and behaviors that are offensive against the female gender. Ms. el Sukaria explained how this prevalent attitude contributes to violence against women in Argentina, as it degrades women and justifies the mistreatment of the female gender. To combat this issue, Ms. el Sukaria, along with the Argentina Global Interfaith Youth Network, will coordinate an Education and Training for religious youth on the issues of machismo, gender inequality and violence against women in Argentina and will be trained on how to effectively address these problems.

**Mr. Parthipan Palanisamy**, Youth Coordinator of Shanti Ashram and member of the Indian Interfaith Youth Network, spoke about the dowry system in India, which puts great financial burden on the daughter's family and leads to female feticide. He also spoke about the general discrimination and violence against women and particularly young girls in India. As part of the initiative, Mr. Palanisamy, along with members of the India Interfaith Youth Network, will hold forums at various universities to educate youth on the religious principles of inalienable rights of women and girls and how youth can advocate for an end to violence against women and girls. Additionally, members of the India Interfaith Youth Network will engage in direct advocacy and lobbying with the Indian government for stronger enforcement of laws prohibiting the dowry system. Additionally, Mr. Palanisamy stressed his hope to strongly engage young men in India to participate in the initiative.

**Ms. Johanna Mae dela Cruz**, Co-coordinator of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines Youth Desk and member of the Philippines Interfaith Youth Network, spoke about the need to increase awareness and engagement of religious leaders and youth in the Philippines to advance the prevention of violence against women and girls. Additionally, Ms. Mae dela Cruz addressed the widespread discrimination of women and girls in the Philippines and the high prevalence of domestic violence against women. Through the initiative, the Philippines Interfaith Youth Network will organize seminar training programs on the religious principles of respect of women and girls and their inalienable rights and how religious communities can advance these rights. Additionally, participants will be educated on the patriarchal culture in the Philippines that renders women inferior and subject to abuses, as well as the primary actions to prevent violence against women and girls in the household. Additionally, the youth network will coordinate the production of resource guides on domestic violence against women and girls and how religious communities can prevent violence against women.

**Ms. Nyambura Gickuki**, Youth Coordinator of the African Council of Religious Leaders – *Religions for Peace* and member of the Africa Interfaith Youth Network gave an emotional speech on sexual violence against women in Uganda, explaining that 1 in 3 women in Uganda experience sexual violence in their lifetime. She invited everyone to look around the audience and realize that if there were all women from Uganda, 1 in 3 would have been raped, subjected to female genital mutilation, or forced into sex slavery. To address the issue of sexual violence in Uganda, the Uganda Interfaith Youth Network will implement a training of religious youth to educate them about the problem of sexual violence against women and girls in Uganda, and train them on how they can advance the rights of women and girls in Uganda by educating the larger community about the issue. Throughout the year, the trained religious youth will return to their communities to educate the public about sexual violence against women and girls in Uganda and the need to advocate for the full protection of women and girls from sexual violence.

After the presentations, Ms. Azab presented the Restoring Dignity – Religious Youth Say No to Violence Against Women website, Facebook page, and online pledge. She called on all attendees to visit the website, make use of the resources, join the facebook page, and share the online pledge with their communities. After reading the pledge to the audience, a hard copy was distributed to the audience members who all signed their pledge to restore the dignity of women and girls.

**Dr. Lilian J. Sison**, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace* – Philippines, delivered the concluding remarks. Dr. Sison expressed solidarity with the youth in implementing the initiative and the importance of religious communities advocating for the full protection of women and girls from violence. She stressed the global aspect of the initiative and the hope to engage all regions in the world in restoring the dignity of women and girls. Finally, Dr. Sison congratulated the Global Interfaith Youth Network for their launch of Restoring Dignity – Religious Youth Say No to Violence Against Women.



Participants of the Launch holding the signed Pledge

## **WARSAW, POLAND | PRESENTATION OF RESTORING DIGNITY - RELIGIOUS YOUTH SAY NO TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN TO THE EUROPEAN INTERFAITH YOUTH NETWORK**

On 17 September 2011, **Mr. Daniel Calder**, Program Officer for Youth and Network Coordination at *Religions for Peace* International, and **Ms. Daniela Malec**, Coordinator of *Religions for Peace* European International Youth Network, presented Restoring Dignity – Religious Youth Say No to Violence Against Women to the European Interfaith Youth Network during their summit in Warsaw, Poland. Mr. Calder explained the initiative, while Ms. Malec gave a presentation on violence against women in Europe and her experiences as a volunteer at a women's shelter for victims of abuse. Mr. Calder and Ms. Malec provided various examples of how the European Interfaith Youth Network can engage in the global initiative and implement activities that restore the dignity of women and girls. The European Interfaith Youth Network will have future consultations and meetings on how they can contribute to the initiative in 2012.

## **NEW YORK, UNITED STATES | PRESENTATION OF RESTORING DIGNITY - RELIGIOUS YOUTH SAY NO TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN TO THE NORTH AMERICAN INTERFAITH YOUTH NETWORK**

On 11 September 2011, **Mr. Daniel Calder** presented the initiative to *Religions for Peace* North American Interfaith Youth Network. Members of the network expressed strong interest in the initiative and plan to actively participate by implementing an activity, such as a Day of Action, to address the issue of violence against women in North America and educate religious communities on how to advocate for the protection of women and girls from violence.

## **BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA | PRESENTATION OF RESTORING DIGNITY - RELIGIOUS YOUTH SAY NO TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN TO THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN INTERFAITH YOUTH NETWORK**

On 31 August 2011, **Ms. Soher el Sukaria** presented the initiative to members of *Religions for Peace* Latin American and Caribbean Interfaith Youth Network at their annual Executive Team meeting. Members provided feedback on how Argentina can effectively implement their activities. Further consultations and meetings will be held to discuss how the initiative can be implemented in other regions of Latin America.

## **RESTORING DIGNITY – RELIGIOUS YOUTH SAY NO TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WEBSITE**

The website for the Restoring Dignity has been officially launched and can be viewed at <http://restoringdignity.religionsforpeaceinternational.org/>. The website features a separate page for the initiative Religious Youth Say No to Violence Against Women. On the website, you can download "Restoring Dignity: A Toolkit For Religious Communities to End Violence Against Women" and send an e-card to a friend asking them to participate in the initiative. Additionally, the restoring dignity pledge is featured and can be electronically signed by visitors from across the world.