

Life, Family, Development: The Role of Women in the Promotion of Human Rights
1st International Conference
Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace
World Women's Alliance for Life & Family (WWALF)
World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (WUCWO)
Rome, March 20-21, 2009

Proposals and Perspectives

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It is appropriate that this conference is being held on the first day of Spring. This season arrives during different parts of the year in the North and South of the world. But places, which are situated in the north experience the spring season from March until June. Spring signifies the emergence of new life. Spring months are the blossoming months that bring growth and rejuvenation. In the Holy Land and other Middle Eastern countries today is celebrated as Mother's Day. Spring is a time of growth, birth, new life, and most importantly, Easter, Christ's Resurrection.

In the words of our dearly departed Chiara Lubich:

“The presence of love in the world is like the coming of the sun in springtime. The arid and barren earth with seemingly nothing to offer suddenly turns green and begins to blossom. The seeds were there all the time, but the warmth they needed was missing. Similarly, the world is full of good intentions and good will. But often these don't produce the desired fruits, because the warmth of love is not there to ripen them.”

Your presence and participation have borne witness to the warmth of your love which can help the seeds sown by the presenters to grow and produce fruit.

As we draw near to the conclusion of two very full days of this international conference on the theme, *Life, Family, Development: the role of women in the promotion of human rights* we member that 60 years ago the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which Pope John Paul II defined as “a true milestone on the path of humanity's moral progress.”

But how has humanity progressed these past 60 years? As we study the topics addressed by participants we can't help but be moved by the many social concerns which reach to all the ends of the earth. We focused on many different ways to promote human dignity and protect human rights beginning with safeguarding the fundamental right to life. We would be hard-pressed to say that humanity is respecting or advancing God's moral law as we note violations of human rights such as abortion, euthanasia, all forms of violence,

trafficking of persons, lack of access to basic education and economic resources. Awareness was raised and solutions were sought to alleviate poverty, trafficking of women and children, infant mortality, to end the sale of human eggs, female foeticide and infanticide, and to increase women's access to education and micro-credit, as well as many other concerns. All of the activities reflected our Catholic Christian values which promote God's moral law.

Two weeks ago our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI included in his Angelus remarks the invitation "to reflect upon the condition of women, and to renew our commitment to ensure that always and everywhere women can live their lives and make full use of their capacities, obtaining complete respect for their dignity. Such was the view expressed by Vatican Council II and the pontifical Magisterium, in particular by Servant of God John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *'Mulieris Dignitatem'* (15 August 1988).. Yet, of more worth even than documents is the witness of saints; and our own times have seen that of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, a humble daughter of Albania who, by the grace of God, became an example for the whole world in the exercise of charity and service to humankind. How many other women work unseen every day for the good of humanity and of the Kingdom of God!" (*Angelus 8 March 2009*)

Countless women are working tirelessly every day for the good of humanity: to right the wrongs which exist in their communities, countries and the world at large. Women exemplify determination and tenacity in caring for their families and loved ones. Women find creative solutions to make do with very little so that there is plenty for all to share. Women reach out anew each day to build peace and promote human rights through simple actions offered with great love. What a powerful force for good in the world!

Interestingly, it was a woman, Eleanor Roosevelt, who chaired the United Nations Human Rights Commission which drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the wake of the horrors of World War II. Mrs. Roosevelt is reported to have carried the following prayer in her handbag and prayed it each night:

Our Father, who has set a restlessness in our hearts and made us all seekers after that which we can never fully find, forbid us to be satisfied with what we make of life. Draw us from base content and set our eyes on far-off goals. Keep us at tasks too hard for us that we may be driven to Thee for strength. Deliver us from fretfulness and self-pitying; make us sure of the good we cannot see and of the hidden good in the world. Open our eyes to the simple beauty all around us and our hearts to the loveliness men hide from us because we do not try to understand them. Save us from ourselves and show us a vision of a world made new.

(*Mother R: Eleanor Roosevelt's Untold Story*, Elliott Roosevelt and James Brough, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1977, NY, USA)

This prayer reminds us of our need to rely on God as we strive to recreate our corner of the world according to God's will. We need to see with the eyes of God the dignity of each person. Praying for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit we must seek to do God's will and strive to make His vision our reality.

Many thanks to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, His Eminence Cardinal Martino, His Excellency Bishop Crepaldi, dear Flaminia, and all of the staff who worked tirelessly to organize this conference.

Thanks to Olimpia and the World Women's Alliance for Life and Family (WWALF) for your energy and enthusiasm for life.

The mission of the Church, like that of Jesus, is God's work or, as Luke often puts it, the work of the Spirit. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the apostles have a powerful experience which completely transforms them: the experience of Pentecost. The coming of the Holy Spirit makes them *witnesses* and *prophets* (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:17-18). It fills them with a serene courage which impels them to pass on to others their experience of Jesus and the hope which motivates them. The Spirit gives them the ability to bear witness to Jesus with "boldness."³³ When the first evangelizers go down from Jerusalem, the Spirit becomes even more of a "guide," helping them to choose both those to whom they are to go and the places to which their missionary journey is to take them. The working of the Spirit is manifested particularly in the impetus given to the mission which, in accordance with Christ's words, spreads out from Jerusalem to all of Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest ends of the earth. *Redemptoris Missio*, 24

Let us go out to the ends of the earth with enthusiasm and energy for the mission with which we have been entrusted.