

**SGI-USA WOMEN SPONSOR HISTORIC PEACE CONFERENCE
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In this issue, we have full coverage of the groundbreaking ‘Imagine Peace’ Conference sponsored by SGI-USA women in the Mid-Atlantic Zone. More than 2,500 people gathered at the World Bank in Washington, D.C., for lectures and workshops on women initiating peace.

More than 2,500 women of varying races, religious backgrounds, nationalities and political perspectives gathered on Feb. 25 at the World Bank in Washington, D.C., to exchange ideas and develop relationships aimed at rebuilding societies, resolving conflicts and making peace.

Growing out of an idea to create a vehicle for women to take action for peace, the “Imagine Peace” Conference was presented by SGI-USA and sponsored by three departments of the World Bank, two departments of The American University, the Center for Visionary Leadership and the United Nations Association, National Capital Area. It brought together community activists, academics and women from diverse backgrounds who want to find ways to create a more peaceful society.

The conference was originally conceived and planned through grassroots participation by women members of SGI-USA who wanted to find a way to communicate their desire for peace. Jean Rosenberg, one of the conference organizers, commented, “This conference was an opportunity for women to realize the tremendous potential they possess as agents of change.”

The diversity of the attendees added to the richness of the discussion, said Nat Coletta of the World Bank Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit. “When you bring people together to share experiences, you learn from each other and realize we’re all the same and want the same things for our children,” Coletta said. “There’s a lot more that bonds us than divides us, and that’s a really important part of a meeting like this.”

Workshops covering top-ics like “Peace Perspectives—Views from Diverse Faith Traditions,” “Building Global Eco-nomic Justice” and “Resolving Conflict: Communication as a First Step” were among 41 sessions presented by experts in their respective fields, held simultaneously throughout the day.

Four “Collaborative Dialogues for Change” were also held using the Earth Charter as a framework, on topics ranging from women’s efforts to build peace in the Middle East to building a safe environment for women.

Dr. Hazel Henderson, environmental economist, futurist and author, called for a change in the “military industrial complex. Instead of wasting resources, that [institution] could be directed towards human development. People do not want more weapons. We want education, clean water, healthcare, adequate food and shelter.”

Other keynote speakers included Ivonne A-Baki, Ecu-a-dorian Ambassador to the United States, and Dr. Corann Okorodudu, president of the Division of Peace Psychology for the American Psychological Association and the APA’s representative to the United Nations.

A “Peace Performance Extravaganza” was held in the World Bank’s atrium during a two-hour break. Performances included an opera aria, Native American dance, Korean and African drummers and a song titled “Imagine Peace,” written especially for the conference

and performed by a 60-voice chorus of men and women. Displays of sculpture, photographs and paintings, and a film festival rounded out the artists' contribution.

Because women are deeply aware of the work involved in creating and nurturing life, said Jane Hurst, women will become the best peacemakers. "This conference is not just for the self, and it's not just coalition building," added Hurst, a professor of philosophy and religion at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. "Here we have this group of women working with a vision. They are just doing it—taking steps to create peace—and like ripples in the water, this vision will spread out to the rest of society."

The "Imagine Peace" dialogue has begun and continues. For comments or ideas for future events, go to <http://peaceconference.homestead.com>.

Please see pages 6, 7 and 12 for more on the conference.

Robin Meader, Washington, D.C., bureau chief, contributed to this article.