

11.00 Session I – “Capacity Building: Empowering Young Women in Dignity and Leadership”

Mrs. Sunhwa Marchan Sell, representing WFWP Spain, chaired the session: “Capacity Building: Empowering Young Women in Dignity and Leadership”. The first speaker was Franziska Nylén, Co-Founder and Public Speaker of “We Found” World Women’s Start-ups and Entrepreneurs Foundation. In her speech she pointed out that it’s impossible to empower women if we are not empowered ourselves. We are born to be leaders and givers, but we also have a beautiful tendency to neglect ourselves. Passion is so important; we must not forget to give value to our social life, and it’s important at times to take a step back to collect our powers. We need to put our oxygen mask on ourselves first. Franziska talked about her life story, aspirations and desires, reflecting on how people portray women. She began to look into real life statistics and saw that very few women were actually in business or business executives. A Harvard study showed that all women outshine men in leadership traits. This situation is a loss of opportunities for women, but also for all of humankind. We’re not helping out in making big decisions. As a co-founder of “We Found”, she helps women to start businesses and gives them the strength to say “you can do it”. Now it has expanded to a network of 2000 women. She also underlined the importance of discovering ourselves, through our thoughts, behaviours and posture. We are the power, and every day is an opportunity to discover our inner world.

After this, Ms. Asmah Anis, Co-ordinator of WFWP Youth UK, took to the podium; she spoke on “The sexualisation of youth” considering different and important points. A lot of contributions came from the audience, in a dynamic way, sharing more points of view. In a lot of cultures, there is a lot of shaming of young girls. If a culture perpetuates this shaming too much then abuse can come into it. The influence also comes from media and internet, that give unhealthy social messages to the youth. We need to emphasise the personality strengths rather than the sex or the physical aspect. Exposing sexualisation to young people deprives them of their childhood and innocence. One of the main contributors to the sexualisation is society. Some children show their pre-adolescent bodies in adult clothing. Another important role is played by media - magazines and marketing. Highly explicit images and music videos are being exposed so easily to young people. Dialogue was stressed as important. Parents have a huge impact on the children, in the sense that the way they behave and communicate shapes the child's view on these topics. It is work we need to do together, in schools, families, and with the help of other organizations.

The next speaker was Ms Christelle Kyora Ngama, Chairwoman for WFWP-Youth in Bolton. She started off WFWP activities with coffee meetings and inviting friends to talk about different issues. At the beginning it wasn’t simple, every day was a work in progress. Now their association is recognised by the Bolton Council. Kyora talked about her story, vision and activities in Bolton and in her place of birth, Congo. Living there was very difficult. All the minerals in Congo are in the areas of conflict: it is the lowest nation in terms of human development. It has always been considered to be under civil war, but it is not rebels fighting each other, it is actually other people coming in and fighting. When she was living there, the rebels were coming to recruit boy soldiers. Boys were dressed up as girls so that they wouldn’t be chosen. Six million people have died there. In 1996, the rebels took over from the government. “48 every hour” - is the amount of women raped in Congo. Barbaric practices have taken place to dehumanise these women. Their dignity is taken. The soldiers come in, they rape and they dehumanise and drive people out so then it becomes their territory - that is their tactic. So they are destroying the family unit to progress. ‘Congo Rises’ is a campaign that Kyora’s group has started in Bolton. Thanks to WFWP, Kyora feels like she has a voice and a platform. They are working to try to ban conflict minerals - companies should be accountable. Amongst the various projects they are initiating, one of them is to create a library in Gomo so that women can be told about their rights. If we are empowered enough, we can do something.

Last but not least, we received the report about the development of WFWP Youth in Europe from Ms. Yoshiko Pammer - Focal Point for WFWPE Young Women. She shared that growth starts with a

seed - an experience that stirs one's curiosity, ignites motivation, and moves one's heart. In order to start something it has to be a personal experience and which can spark a fire in you. Yoshiko talked about her experience in Japan, in many ways the root country of the WFWP work, where she attended a workshop for women which sparked the desire to do more together as women. Questions such as "What is it to be a woman?", "What has been the historical path of women?" etc. were the starting point. Then by sharing the inspiration with someone else and connecting with the foundation that already existed in the UK, she started doing workshops for young women and step by step things could progress. She gave the audience a current overview about the young women activities around Europe, in particular in the United Kingdom, Austria, Italy, and Norway. It's important to work together, inviting young women to contribute. A lot of youth just don't know what Women's Federation is about. It is an opportunity to widen our reach and make an impact on society. After the speech, a group activity involved the audience, where pairs had to give each other a two-minute elevator pitch for "What is WFWP?" and "What can WFWP contribute to society"- an occasion to share ideas, and for a seed to grow.