

Press release

## Chancellor Merkel opens 1<sup>st</sup> Assembly on Women, Faith & Diplomacy with welcoming message

**For four days, representatives of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other religions will speak virtually about new forms of policy-making – with a focus on women and diplomacy**

**Lindau, 10 November 2020** – Over 600 participants from more than 60 countries will meet virtually on Tuesday afternoon to kick off the *1<sup>st</sup> Assembly on Women, Faith & Diplomacy* organised by the inter-religious non-governmental organisation *Religions for Peace*. The common goal: to find new ways to promote inter-religious dialogue even in difficult times. The first international assembly specifically on the topic of women, faith and diplomacy will be held, mostly virtually, over the course of four days. It is organised by a steering team in Lindau on Lake Constance.

Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel will open the assembly virtually and in her welcome address will refer to the Islamist terror in Austria, France and Germany during the last weeks: “Recent events clearly show the importance of inter-religious dialogue. We must not grant any leeway to extremists who, in their inhuman ignorance, abuse religion to sow the seeds of strife and undermine our peaceful coexistence. Just how important this is has also been demonstrated by the atrocious events in Dresden, France and in Vienna this autumn.” Merkel will also emphasise the crucial role of women in inter-religious dialogue: “Religions find themselves connected precisely in their shared quest for peace. And we know: Peace is only sustainable if women are involved in the peace process.”

Alongside Chancellor Merkel, UN Secretary General António Guterres and Michelle Müntefering, Minister of State for International Cultural Policy at the German Federal Foreign Office, will deliver virtual welcoming remarks. The assembly is supported and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office. At the opening press conference, Andreas Gorgen, Head of the Department for Culture and Communication at the Federal Foreign Office, said: “Women of faith play critical roles in conflict resolution, in education and healthcare, in humanitarian work and in ensuring community-based action. This work – which carries a message of hope – is especially important in this current global Covid-19-Pandemic. We are therefore, delighted that this conference is happening at this moment and we gladly support it.”

Under the motto “Keeping Faith, Transforming Tomorrow”, participants will reflect on the global role of women, their challenges in leadership and policy-making as well as their responsibilities in multi-religious peacebuilding and international development. For Azza Karam, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*, the growing influence of women in contributing to peace and security worldwide is a key focus. The aim of the assembly: to include women and faith in diplomacy.

Margot Kässmann, former state bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover and member of the Council of *Religions for Peace*, presented the programme for the coming days at the press conference. The four focal areas are: leadership with a focus on women in both formal and informal leadership positions; the role and special skills of women in peace-building and conflict management; values-based education as a foundation for a more peaceful global society; and the protection of the environment. Kässmann pointed out: “In my experience, women use power differently than men: in achieving their goals and on the path to them, they strive for transparency, they use their contacts and seek to convince others – calmly but with determination. And yet women are still in a minority in leadership positions. This is regrettable – because it is in peace processes in particular where the special skills of women should be made use of much more often.”

The virtual conference is held by the *Foundation for the Peace Dialog of World Religions and Civil Society (Ring for Peace)*, based in Lindau, and its Chairman Prof. Wolfgang Schürer, who has also been a Trustee and Honorary President of *Religions for Peace* since 2019. Schürer is committed to strengthening female leadership in peace processes supported by religious actors: “In dealing with the current pandemic specifically, female leaders like Angela Merkel, Jacinda Ardern or Tsai Ing-wen have shown that they are often particularly capable of leading their countries through crisis and fostering a greater sense of responsibility to the benefit of society as a whole. These female strengths are also needed among religious leaders to create a culture of inspiration and hope in supporting peace processes.”

The managing director of the foundation, Ulrich Schneider, emphasised that for the steering team of around 80 people, which will be running the conference from Lindau, there is a comprehensive COVID-19 infection prevention and hygiene concept in place, which is significantly stricter than the legal requirements. A hygiene officer has been appointed and all persons entering the Inselhalle in Lindau will be tested daily.

On 11 November, there will also be an inter-religious Peace & Light Ceremony at the *Ring for Peace*, an inter-religious peace symbol built last year, in Lindau’s Luitpoldpark.

**Press accreditation for the 1<sup>st</sup> Assembly on Women, Faith & Diplomacy in Lindau:**

<https://ringforpeace.org/press/accreditation/>

**Further information, photos for download, livestreams, vitae, press releases and regular updates can be found at:**

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