
**Young women of faith and transformative leadership in the response to COVID-19:
An Intergenerational conversation**

Zoom conversation

30 June 2020, 9:30-10:30 AM EST

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Context:

Worldwide, most people (85% by one estimate) aged 18-39 years old identify with a religious group¹. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, where the population tends to be younger, faith populations are younger too, with an average age of 23 years old for Muslims, 26 for Hindus and 34 for Christians². Today, 100% of people aged 18-39 years in the Middle East are counted as part of a religious group, and 98% in Sub-Saharan Africa³. The demographic dynamics have many geopolitical implications. For example, it is projected that by 2050, four out of every ten Christians in the world will live in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Hindu population will rise by 34% and the Muslim population will equal the Christian population⁴. In sum, a large percentage of the world's youth population has a religious affiliation, and the numbers may well grow in the future. Faith is an important aspect of life for many young women and girls' identity across the world, shaping their economic, political and social life, as well as the way they interact with their community, their friends and their family.

Faith organizations and communities are playing critical roles in the humanitarian response to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Young feminist women of faith constitute an important part of this response and yet they remain a largely unnoticed and untapped constituency in this pandemic. Even though they are at the forefront of the crisis as health workers and primary caregivers delivering care and services following faith-inspired principles of solidarity and compassion, their leadership is frequently overlooked. They are setting examples of transformative leadership, within their faith communities, challenging the limited role attributed to women from centuries of strict interpretation of sacred texts. This type of leadership pushes for new frontiers of advocacy, to build back better and bring lasting and transformative change that will help safeguard future generations of young women.

Young women of faith have important roles to play in the COVID crisis, especially in reimagining a better future. It is crucial to understand the importance of engaging with this key constituency and to amplify their leadership, as gender equality advocates in their communities and organizations. One path is to ensure that they tell their stories and that they are heard.

Objectives:

¹ Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. 2020. *Religious Observance By Age And Country*. [online] Available at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/young-adults-remain-the-world-are-its-religious-by-several-measures/> [Accessed 13 May 2020].

² Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. 2012. *The Global Religious Landscape*. [online] Available at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/> [Accessed 13 May 2020].

³ Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. 2020. *Religious Observance By Age And Country*. [online] Available at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/> [Accessed 13 May 2020].

⁴ Idem. [Accessed 13 May 2020].

- Offer a platform for an intergenerational conversation with young women of faith sharing their perspectives as well as highlights of their work as they respond to COVID-19 in their communities
- Shed light on the existing structural barriers that young women and girls are facing to their leadership
- Demonstrate through pertinent examples how young women of faith's leadership can bring transformative change for gender equality in the COVID-19 crisis

Rationale:

This intergenerational conversation will involve a collaborative dialogue amongst young people of different faiths ascertaining their insights and identifying common ground for their work, across sectors and regions. It will be an opportunity for young people of faith to also discuss how their faith interacts with their identity as a driver for a more inclusive, equal and peaceful world.

The outcomes of these conversations will be to highlight steps to support positive faith responses strengthened through young people's leadership. The conversation will also inform broader public and curated conversations around faith-inspired feminism in the Generation Equality Forum and CSW 65.

Methodology:

This conversation will showcase the strength, resilience and leadership of young women of faith in times of crisis. It will also showcase how stories can be told through art by a young indigenous woman playing a flute. UN Women will contextualize the conversation and the Berkeley Center will introduce the panelists. A possibility of an intergenerational co-moderating of the session. A young woman will break the session with spoken word telling her lived reality during this pandemic. The audience will be encouraged to send questions into the chat box and a co-moderator will monitor the questions and send the most pertinent questions to the lead moderator to present to the panel for follow up.

Format: (1 hour)

An intergenerational co-moderation – **Katherine Marshall** and **Ruth Gopin** (Berkeley Center)

1. Story telling through art – a musical interpretation – **Jamie Medicine Crane** – Canada (3 minutes)
2. Introduction of the panel – **Katherine Marshall** (5 minutes)
3. Framing the conversation - **Lopa Banerjee**, Director, Civil Society Division & Executive Coordinator, Generation Equality Forum (5 minutes)
4. Intergenerational curated conversation (There will be questions in between from the audience): 35 minutes
 - **Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka** - Executive Director, UN Women
 - **Martine Dushime** – Anglican Communion, Burundi
 - **Talia Kaplan** – JTS, USA
 - **Naomi Woyengu** – World YWCA, Papua New Guinea
5. Concluding remarks – Ruth Gopin (5 minutes)

Guiding questions:

- As a woman, wearing so many hats and on the front line of the fight against COVID-19, what have been the major obstacles and structural barriers you have encountered? (Specific to the ED)
- As young women leading the response to COVID-19, what role have you played? What obstacles have you encountered?

- How is your leadership contributing to the transformative agenda of tackling the resilience of patriarchal inequalities in a COVID-19 context?
- What should be in place to sustain your leadership now and beyond?
- Can this moment be a catalyst for young women of faith to transform traditional definitions of leadership and leadership roles?
- How do you plan to contribute to that and what can other young women of faith do in their communities?

Partners:

- UN Women
- Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University
- Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities
- Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue (MCID), Jewish Theological Seminary
- World YWCA
- Anglican Communion
- Bahai International Community

The event will be open to the public and hosted by the Berkley Center.

A flyer will be created, posted online and shared with the Berkley Center audience.

Flyers will also be distributed to:

- UN Women Staff
- The Inter-Agency Task Force
- The Multi Faith Advisory Council
- Civil Society Organizations
- Governments