

Foundations for Peace Network launched

The Foundations for Peace Network was launched in New York on 27 June. The members of this new Network are all locally based foundations working in areas of conflict throughout the world. This fact, said Barry Gaberman, welcoming the initiative on behalf of the Ford Foundation, means that they have a unique insight into the problems and potential for building peace and resolving conflict. Their unique experiences offer opportunities to share and learn from each other while supporting new peacebuilding efforts and wider awareness raising.

This message was endorsed by Mary Robinson, previously UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, speaking at a reception the previous evening.

The importance of linking local experiences to global concerns and interests was a theme that ran through all the speeches at the launch. Oscar Rojas (AlvarAlice Foundation, Colombia) explained how critical the South African insights were to a conference that his foundation had organized to address issues of Transitional Justice in Colombia. Patrick Canagasingham described how the Neelan Tiruchelvan Trust had been involved in a civic delegation that brought business people and trade union leaders from Sri Lanka to Northern Ireland to discuss corporate responsibility in peacebuilding.

A second theme was the complexity and isolation of living and funding in conflict situations, where every funding or policy decision is examined for potential bias and every non-grantmaking initiative interrogated as to possible political motivation.

Network members have prioritized collective work on the role of victims of violence as the champions of peacebuilding and will promote the theme in their respective countries. The Themba Lesizwe Fund (South Africa) and the Neelan Tiruchelvan Trust (Sri Lanka) will be leading this work over the coming year. Other priority themes for the Network are the contribution of women to peacebuilding in areas of conflict and the needs of young people caught up in conflict situations.

The Themba Lesizwe Fund is one of three new members of the Network, the others being the Women's Reconstruction Fund from Serbia and the Manusher Jonno Foundation from Bangladesh. They join the existing members from India, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Israel and Colombia. Network members must be independent funders, indigenous to a divided society and committed to peacebuilding, social justice and equality.

Initial funding to develop the Network has been made available through the European Union PEACE II Programme in Northern Ireland and the Ford Foundation.

For more information

www.foundationsforpeace.org