

## **International Women's Day, 2021 – Two Webinars**

***Women, Diversity, and Peace*** sponsored by Welcome Clubs International (on Zoom)

Kim Riedel, President of WCI, welcomed participants from around the world and introduced Reem Iversen, WCI Director of programs. The guest speakers were Nicola Byok in Hamburg, Germany, and Danielle Robertson in Washington, D. C.

Ms Byok is a free-lance diversity consultant in Germany. The emphasis of her work is gender equity in the workplace. She stresses the advantages of having women in the top echelons in companies. Women present diverse points of view and their presence on a board of directors makes that body more accurately reflect the make-up of the company's clientele. Despite advances, gender equity will not come without legislation.

Ms Robertson works for the U.S. Institute of Peace and emphasizes the role women can play, and have played, in peace negotiations. She cited three remarkable women:

Angela Maria Escobar is a peacebuilder and human rights defender. She was instrumental in seeing that the Colombia Peace Agreement address sexual violence.

Tabassum Adnan of Pakistan enabled women to participate in the local governing bodies called jirgas, and even formed the first all-female jirga.

Rita Martin Lopidia of South Sudan was the driving force in the South Sudanese peace negotiations to end the lengthy conflict and was the only woman signator.

Some recognition has been garnered for women in peace negotiations and the Women, Peace, and Security Act was signed into law in the U.S. 2017. This bipartisan act will strengthen efforts to prevent, mitigate, and resolve conflict by increasing women's participation in negotiation and mediation processes.

In the Q and A session both women were asked for book recommendations and the following were recommended:

**Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men** by [Caroline Criado Perez](#)

**Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer, and Sex Changed a Nation at War** by [Leymah Gbowee](#). Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2011

**How to be Successful Without Hurting Men's Feelings** by Sarah Cooper

The session ended with a photomontage of 36 women government leaders around the world right now.

**Empowered Women Empower Women** sponsored by Partners for World Health

Elizabeth McLellan, founder and president of Partners for World Health, introduced the program. She defined an empowered woman as a woman who recognizes her strengths and has the courage to use them. Women become empowered by family, mentors and, the role models of empowered women.

The first speaker was Tara Sharafuden, born in India and now working in Azerbaijan, the Chair of the International Advisory Board, Azerbaijan Rural Women's Association. She described a government program which empowers women with low skills and education in rural areas of Azerbaijan. The program is called "From Whispers to Voices". It is a self-help group where women pool their resources to start a small business. Sample businesses are eldercare, farm crops and even trash collection. The women meet regularly and receive training in financial management and business practices.

The second speaker, Ehklas Ahmed was born in Sudan but her family came to Maine to escape the genocide in Darfur. Although her family is still steeped in old traditions (a girl needs a husband, not an education), Ehklas persevered and not only got an education but founded a non-profit called "Chance to Advance". This organization strives to highlight and promote diversity in Maine by providing a platform for immigrants to share their stories.