

Speech by María Lía Zervino, *Servidora*, WUCWO President General  
from the Catholic perspective, in the interreligious and ecumenical event  
for the **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY: *Women Makers of Human Fraternity***  
3 March 2020, Rome

We are here to make a bold and prophetic commitment.

I am deeply grateful to my fellow speakers, leaders of the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Hebrew and Christian communities who have accepted the invitation we extended to them on behalf of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO) to publicly express our joyful and common acceptance of the document "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together," by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb and His Holiness Pope Francis.

The preparation of this meeting began some time ago, during a fruitful dialogue with the Holy See's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, to whose Prefect, Cardinal Miguel Ayuso, and his collaborators I wish to express our gratitude, as well as to those who helped us on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Italian Episcopal Conference.

I also would like to express particular appreciation and gratitude to the four women who are granting us the honour of sponsoring this event and who make their respective countries stand out, that is Austria, the Philippines, the Netherlands and Argentina, leading their diplomatic representation to the Holy See: Ambassadors, Madam Minister in charge, thank you very much.

I would like to try to answer three questions: **why**, **how** and **what for**.

Why did WUCWO decide to celebrate the **International Women's Day** in the year 2020 with an interreligious and ecumenical event under the title "Women Makers of Human Fraternity"? For being faithful to our roots.

WUCWO was founded in 1910 as an international organisation to represent Catholic women in the world by pioneering and visionary women who took up the cause of PEACE in the League of Nations, first, and then at the United Nations and in every corner of the planet where they spread their action. For this cause, they suffered persecution during the Second World War. At the Second Vatican Council, their prophecy was embodied by Pilar Bellosillo, their President, who participated as auditor. Today, before the call of the historic text of the two religious leaders, we are urged to respond to that call.

Before the unprecedented Abu Dhabi document, we are urged, also as WUCWO, to assume our responsibility as the only women's organisation recognised by the Catholic Church, as an International Public Association of the Faithful. This makes us commit even more in our service to the Church and the society in which we live.

Like the previous speakers, it is the faith in God WUCWO's deepest motivation for celebrating this Day with this event. It is the God in whom we believe that drives us from within, taking our minds and hearts so that *human fraternity* is transformed more and more into concrete actions.

**How** has WUCWO planned to celebrate the International Women's Day this year?

We have set out to do so by focusing, with *women's eyes*, on the essential care of the planet and all our fellow citizens, particularly the most vulnerable and discarded. From our common women's perspective, we know that we are particularly capable of:

- watching over our "common home" as the home of our human family;
- overcoming the culture of hatred, violence and war by sowing the culture of mercy, peace and social friendship;
- reaching out to those who are in need, living in the existential peripheries as a result of poverty, discrimination, persecution and ideologies that are often the consequence of erroneous religious interpretations and other reasons, through listening, being close to them, and searching together and creatively for alternatives;

- cultivating the encounter and maternal accompaniment of minors and suffering families, of unborn children and the elderly and dying, of victims of human trafficking, injustice and forced migration, of refugees and of so many others, thanks to our special resilience, that is, our capacity to face crises and to overcome changes;
- reacting, with courage and without losing our tenderness, to those who manage policies of fundamentalism and division typical of systems of insatiable profit and false religious justifications of conflicts at the political level;
- asserting our equal rights in relation to men, in order to proceed co-responsibly in the construction of a more just and fraternal society, contributing our adequate preparation and experience, united with our feminine nature.

We have set out to celebrate “our Day” in a collaborative way, offering the possibility of a dialogue with women leaders in their respective faith communities. We wish to give a testimony of harmony and respect for the diversity that characterises us, and to appreciate the charismas and contributions of each of our traditions and beliefs. We believe that the time has come for women to unite and raise their voices, recognising the positive advances of our current civilization and all that remains to be done.

This celebration is not an isolated event but a milestone in our common journey. Together, as women of faith, we have started a process based on this sort of “Magna Carta” for the construction of a more just and inclusive world, not as a final stage, but as a starting point for a work of mutual cooperation and new possibilities of action. A starting point that inspires us, that allows us to open doors to travel new paths by combining criteria and efforts with so many others already committed to peaceful coexistence through dialogue and mutual understanding. There is still much to be developed.

**What** are we holding this meeting **for**, offering a joint final statement on *Women Makers of Human Fraternity* as a simple and meaningful gesture?

To summarise what we have been praying, discerning, writing and manifesting to each other, among women of different continents and cultures. And to commit ourselves publicly, each one from her faith, to the deepening, the dissemination and the development of the potentialities that the agreement on which we are reflecting offers us.

And to give a common witness that will be a step towards the educational alliance promoted by Pope Francis, the *Global Compact in Education*, to create a network that will ensure children and young people the conditions necessary for their harmonious personal development and their inclusion in a more welcoming and humane society. For every change, an educational path is necessary.

Finally, to summon you, who are honouring us with your physical and virtual presence, and all those who carry in their hearts faith in God and faith in human fraternity, to join this covenant for the construction of authentic peace and fraternal coexistence.

Together, with the help of God, we can achieve it!