



Advocacy Update

Sent December 15, 2010

WRJ Work on Maternal Death and Fistula Featured at Religions for Peace Multi-Religious Forum

On December 6, 2010, Religions for Peace convened “Maternal Deaths and Fistula,” the Restore Dignity Multi-Religious Forum. World-wide, girls and women die in pregnancy and childbirth or as a result of rape and sexual violence at the rate of one per minute. Often, those who survive are left with obstetric or traumatic fistula and are abandoned by their families and communities. The forum was held as part of a multi-religious initiative to “secure maternal health for all and prevent violence against women.”

The first panel included outstanding speakers from UN agencies that deal with women’s issues. Sheryl WuDunn, co-author with Nicholas Kristoff of Half the Sky gave the keynote address, providing a powerful "on-the-ground" perspective. The second panel included medical professionals who work in medical facilities serving fistula patients in Tanzania and Uganda.

WRJ was asked to be the first organization on the panel, “Good Practices in Education and Awareness, to report on its fistula-related efforts. Moreover, WRJ was honored because former WRJ President Judith M. Hertz was tapped to lead that segment of the program. WRJ attendees included Judith Hertz, Janet T. Stovin and Rosalyn Shapiro – WRJ’s non-governmental representatives to the UN’s Department of Public Information, and Carolyn Kunin, WRJ’s director of Programming and Advocacy.

Speaker Highlights:

- Women’s faith groups, working in partnerships need to address "unmentionable" controversial issues, aligning our strengths in calling for preventive and restorative legislation.
- Faith groups have a huge role in reminding their people that maternal deaths can be prevented through family planning and reproductive health services, in legislative advocacy, and in engaging youth in programs, such as the UN Foundation’s "Girl Up."

Maternal deaths and fistula are best framed in the context of violence against women and structural gender-based inequality, as also seen in child marriage and female genital mutilation.