



The Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP)

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**ATOP Meaningfulworld United Nations 66<sup>th</sup> CSW Parallel Event**  
**Natural Disasters and Gender Equality: Nurturing Ecological Consciousness**

**17 March 2022**

**Alyssa Curcio**

How are the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals addressing equality and equity for women around the world? What is The Association for Trauma Outreach and Prevention (ATOP) MeaningfulWorld doing to nurture gender equality following natural disasters? And what are the challenges faced by stakeholders around the globe? These and other key questions were addressed at ATOP Meaningfulworld's 66<sup>th</sup> United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) Parallel Event on 17 March 2022. The important topics of Natural Disasters and Gender Equality were presented to a group of enthusiastic participants and speakers that included interns, academicians, NGOs, and United Nations Fellows. We were specially honored by Ambassador Dr. Sima Karetnaya, who served as our Honorary Chair. Our program was one of 750 parallel events apart from the CSW66 Forum. The event was open to the public for those who wanted to learn about the impact of natural disasters, specifically on women and young girls, and what is the status of gender equality around the world.

Dr. Ani Kalayjian, president and founder of Meaningfulworld began the program by welcoming everyone and reading her original poem entitled Gratitude to Mother Earth. The main message of the poem was to nurture and care for Mother Earth because she can nurture and heal us as well, as she is the "Natural Healer."



*Thank you, Mother Earth, on this  
66<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CSW at United Nations.  
Just like you we all possess  
The power to choose, to Be, to care, and  
To watch our emotions with detachment and love.*

Invocation followed led by Ms. Frances Edward, who is the chair of the Spiritual Caucus at the United Nations. Ms. Edward's meditation invited participants to be mindful of our physical connection to Mother Earth while opening our hearts and minds.



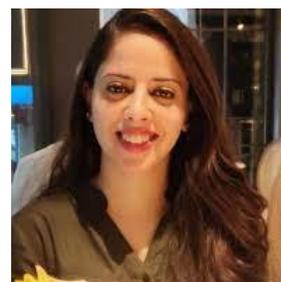
Dr. Kalayjian introduced our Honorary Chair, Ambassador Dr. Sima Karetnaya, who is a US Ambassador of Health and Global Peace in the world's Global Peace Chain. Ambassador Karetnaya opened her presentation discussing the present war between Ukraine and Russia, and how living in a time of war has an immediate impact on women and young girls of Ukraine. She stressed the importance of teaching young girls to be independent by helping them understand different cultures, genders, and how to be sensitive to each other's differences. In order to see changes in gender inequalities, young girls must be educated in numerous aspects of life such as the biological phases of life induced by changing hormones. Ambassador Karetnaya stated that "girls bear life into the world", and because of this are subjected to hormone imbalances that many around the world are unprepared for because of a lack of education. She believes that to have more equality, young girls must be educated properly to empower themselves, their families, and other women around them.



The first invited speaker was Professor Frances Boulon, a school psychologist and Coordinator of International Relations for Asociación de Psicología de Puerto Rico. Dr. Boulon discussed the natural disasters devastating Puerto Rico, such as hurricanes and other natural disasters. In Puerto Rico, back-to-back hurricanes and the ongoing pandemic have caused citizens to feel compounded trauma that is a huge challenge. During times of natural disasters, the education of young students is impacted as schools were shut down for long periods of time, which hindered the continuity of learning. However, during these hard times, female leadership has shown great resilience and it is so important to continue to support women in leadership. Dr. Boulon emphasized the importance of preserving natural resources and approaching all aspects of life with new strategies to really see change in a world still suffering.



Ufra Mir was the next speaker from Kashmir, who discussed the challenges of being in a crisis zone and how these crises like natural disasters affect women. Ms. Mir is the founder of the International Center for Peace Psychology which focuses on how knowledge in psychology is needed when dealing with trauma. She uses Kashmir as an example of a country in crisis in terms of gender equality because armed conflicts produce more sexual and gender-based violence against women. The stigma in Kashmir (as well as in other countries) is that if women go to psychotherapy, they must be crazy, which is why so many women avoid professional support. Ms. Mir's organization provides interventions and training for people in need of psychological help. She believes that preparation and empowerment are necessary for gender equality.



Our Vice President Andrew Dolinar was the next to speak about all the amazing work Meaningfulworld has accomplished in 33 years in relation to natural disasters and gender equality. He emphasized how individual healing allows for us to make changes in others around us which then impacts the world. Mr. Dolinar expressed that change can occur with healing and education, research and publications, policy revisions, and UN advocacy. To nurture this change, ATOP uses a 7-step Integrative Healing Model nurturing empathy and Emotional Intelligence. Mr. Dolinar explained how the main

problem of gender post-natural disasters are disparities in education. Since education is the first to be sacrificed, power differentials affecting resource allocations follow with multiple cultural restrictions. Finally, he discussed the importance of men and boys becoming educated on gender issues and becoming enthusiastic advocates for gender equality.

The next speaker was Ms. Maria Quezada, who is a social entrepreneur in Guatemala with the goal of accessing new models of education while using technology. Ms. Quezada expressed that, “everyone wants to go to school, but there are not enough schools”, which is a problem in many countries. In Guatemala, most adolescents do not even graduate from high school. The major issues in Guatemala are that most students who do make it to high school lack basic reading and math skills. Her goal is to create remedial programs for these high school students using technology. Ms. Quezada believes that teaching should stray from the curriculum and cater to the individual needs, adapting the system and meeting the children where they are.

Mr. William Miller followed with a convocation. Mr. Miller has been facilitating meditation groups since 2009 and has conducted numerous workshops. He led the meeting in a closing meditation that brought uplifting peace to our audience.

In conclusion, a lively Q & A took place. Dr. Kalayjian encouraged everyone to take positive action by sharing the conference with our family and friends through social media.

To learn more about future events and programs, kindly visit [www.meaningfulworld.com](http://www.meaningfulworld.com).



Founded in 1990, the Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP) Meaningfulworld, a charitable organization affiliated with the United Nations Dept. of Public Information, has achieved international recognition as a leader in training humanitarian outreach professionals as well as responding to two and a half decades of global and local disasters. ATOP is committed to health, justice, peace, transformation and global education promoting state-of-the-art scientific theory on peace, forgiveness, consciousness research, internship, and the development of technical skills to train mental health professionals, teachers, psychologists, art therapists, nutritionists, alternative medicine practitioners, clergy, nurses, mediators, interfaith ministers, and laypersons committed to service of the self and humanity. Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Outreach Teams have helped rehabilitate survivors from over 48 countries and 26 states in the USA, making a daily difference in people’s lives and helping to transform tragedy and trauma into healing and meaning-making through post-trauma growth, resilience, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, mind-body-eco-spirit health, visionary leadership, empowerment, artful collaborations, and establishing Peace & Forgiveness Gardens to create a new and Meaningfulworld view. We work locally and globally in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East, The Caucasus, Europe, and South and North America.

**Our Motto: When one helps another, BOTH become stronger**

