



WORLD PEACE FORUM 2006 VANCOUVER, CANADA, 23-28 JUNE

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Women, Peace and Sustainability By Kristen Thompson [June 28-2006]

VANCOUVER - "It's in sharing a dream that you keep it."

Those were the words of Mona Polacca, a member of the Colorado River Indian Tribe and one of a handful of women who spoke on Monday afternoon as part of the World Peace Forum.

Polacca, a Hopi elder who has worked on Native American alcoholism, domestic violence and mental health-related issues and is working on her PhD at the Interdisciplinary Justice Studies department of Arizona State University, was at Peace Forum on behalf of The International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, a group of women, representing indigenous cultures from around the world, who are concerned with the destruction of the earth and indigenous ways of life.

"There's got to be a change, and there's got to be a better way of living," she told the audience gathered at the auditorium in the Student Union Building for the Women: Peace and Sustainability forum, where influential women, all leaders in their communities, shared their knowledge on how to build sustainable and ecologically friendly communities.

Polacca said the teachings of indigenous elders, irregardless of their culture, provide valuable lessons on the necessity of respecting the earth to ensure the health and prosperity of all who live on it.

"It's a shame that mother earth is suffering the way she is. It's a shame that [people think] if it's not at your back door, it's not connected to you. If you don't think it's your problem today, it soon will be. It's up to us to take a stand. We have to say we want peace in this world to sustain our lives and the lives that are yet to come."

"You're not here for yourself," she told the audience. "You're a representative of all your ancestors. At some time they thought about you and said prayers for the generations they were not going to see."

This, she said, was what we needed to do right now. To change the way we treat the world because our actions will have an affect on our posterity. This is why the Thirteen Grandmothers came together, and why she came to share their dream with the World Peace Forum.

"We reach out towards one another with an open hand, with a gesture of peace, support and life. Take home the messages you've heard here. I think that's the whole point of coming together like this, to be connected with other people who want to create a balanced and homogenized way of living with each other, and carrying on the work of our ancestors."

Other speakers at the women's peace and sustainability forum included Dr. Janet Eaton, Co-Chair of Canadian Voice of Women for Peace (VOW), which promotes women's roles in advancing peace, social justice, and respect and cooperation among nations; June Zeitlin, executive director of the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), which advocates for women's equality in global policy; and Gabriela Videla, a Chilean journalist and author who works towards making indigenous communities in Central Mexico economically self-reliant and culturally sustainable.