



**Women Forward International Presents "The Vanguard:"  
The Creative Expression of those Daring to Make their Research Matter**

On June 10th, Women Forward International will co-host with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) *The Vanguard*, where the bridging of mind and heart is no longer an anomaly, but a norm, and a new humanity is no longer a dream but an awakening reality.

**MEDIA ADVISORY  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Lori Rose-Drew  
Executive Assistant  
at [Lori@WomenForwardInternational.org](mailto:Lori@WomenForwardInternational.org)  
or (202) 844-2618 ext: 1008



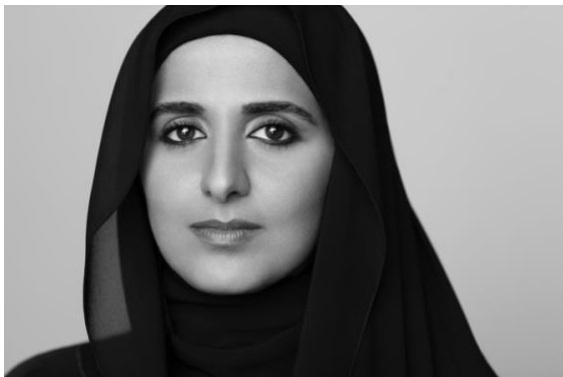
Washington, D.C. (June 2021) – A new paradigm for human relations is emerging – one that puts the human heart in its rightful place in our daily interactions and in those among nations. At one time deemed of marginal importance, in this era of the pandemic, many are realizing the necessity for real change through spontaneous love and service, rather than institutions and bureaucracy, in which we all recognize ourselves in one another. COVID 19, the great leveler, has brought forward a passionate movement for human unity.

As our cohort of talented scholarly teams, including from Stanford, Yale, Cornell, Georgetown, and Lynn Universities, and our influential partner organizations present their collaborative work without academic jargon, our event will be keynoted by a woman leader in the Arts, Her Excellency Sheikha Al-Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Chairperson of Qatar Museums, Doha Film Institute, Reach Out to Asia and Qatar Leadership Centre.

While nations can enact any number of laws, the outmoded behaviors of whole cultures can only evolve when the human heart is awakened. Art is an instrument that when inspired with love, can bring about consciousness and culture change. For too long, it has traditionally been excluded from the study of politics and the social sciences. But it, too, deserves a place in all fields of education, because it has the capacity to move and speak to that mysterious part of ourselves that goes beyond the mind.

Together, our Women Forward International community will inspire in the international community new ways to come together based on the power of the human heart and the unity it engenders to address women's leadership in conflict resolution; women's vital role in sustainable systems; women and economic empowerment; and women and education. It is time for the world to finally understand, through direct experience, that women moving *forward* in these areas is mandatory in order for the world to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and to bring forth a new era of peace and prosperity.

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER



### **Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani**

CHAIRPERSON QATAR MUSEUMS, DOHA FILM INSTITUTE, REACH OUT TO ASIA AND QATAR LEADERSHIP CENTRE

Sheikha Al Mayassa Bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani is engaged in the fields of formal and informal education. She is Chairperson of Qatar Museums, Doha Film Institute,

Reach Out to Asia, and Qatar Leadership Centre. In having the privilege to serve her country in multiple fields – among them culture, leadership, education, and philanthropy – she has been able to facilitate conversations across borders and fields. As a public servant, her objective is to invest in Qatar’s local community and celebrate the country’s diversity using the visual arts as a vehicle for communication. Her current interests are in human development, cultural regionalism, environmental stewardship and sustainability, and economic growth using culture as a catalyst for education, dialogue, and exchange. Through her public work and support of the Qatar Vision 2030, she is building an exciting creative future for the country that will connect artistic communities in all areas of culture.

## SPEAKERS



### Murshida Carol Weyland Conner

SPIRITUAL LEADER OF SUFISM REORIENTED;  
FOUNDER OF THE WHITE PONY EXPRESS

Dr. Carol Weyland Conner, a professional psychologist and teacher, is the murshida, or spiritual leader, of Sufism Reoriented, an American spiritual school chartered by Meher Baba. The daughter of a musician and educator, Dr. Conner studied English literature at the University of California in Berkeley, French literature at the Sorbonne in Paris, and medieval studies at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. She received her PhD in clinical psychology from Catholic University in Washington, DC, in 1976. After teaching for several years in the George Washington University School of Medicine, Dr. Conner went into private practice as a therapist, practicing for twenty-five years in Walnut Creek, California, during which time she was also a volunteer counselor with Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity in nearby San Francisco. Associated with Sufism Reoriented since the mid-1970s, she accepted an appointment as the murshida of the spiritual school after retiring from private practice in 2001.

Murshida Conner founded the volunteer service programs Following Francis and White Pony Express to serve the needs of those on the margins of society. These innovative programs have received numerous awards, foundation grants, and national recognition, tapping a reservoir of positive energy and support for the principles of shared abundance and universal brotherhood, hallmarks of the age now dawning.



## Sandra Espinet

### LUXURY INTERIOR DESIGNER

Sandra Espinet is a well-established and internationally published high-end interior designer, working and living between Los Angeles and San Jose del Cabo, Mexico. Born in Trinidad and Tobago, Ms. Espinet has lived in eight different countries, and she brings her global adventures to her clients' homes, creating luxurious and well-traveled interiors.

Ms. Espinet graduated with design and art degrees in Georgia and Massachusetts, and then earned a Master's in Production Design from AFI in Los Angeles. She transformed sets on movies and television, but eventually, returned to her true love, interior design. After twenty-five years as a luxury interior designer, she is now considered an industry expert and has been featured on HGTV's *Celebrity Holiday Homes* (2009), *Halloween Block Party* (2010), *Bang for Your Buck 40k Outdoor Kitchens Miami* (2010) and *HGTV'd* (2011). With many other approaching new television projects, she is a budding star in the arena of home and lifestyle television.



## Latanya Mapp Frett

### PRESIDENT, GLOBAL FUND FOR WOMEN

Latanya Mapp Frett is President and CEO of Global Fund for Women. Previously, Ms. Frett was the Executive Director of Planned Parenthood Global, the international arm of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, with regional and country offices in Africa and Latin America. She worked for eight years as a human rights officer for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and for 10 years with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

An attorney by training, Ms. Frett began her career at the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund in Washington, DC. She has received many honors and awards, including the Superior Honor Award from the U.S. State Department, and the Colin Powell Fellowship. Ms. Frett currently serves on the Board of Directors at Oxfam America and CHANGE, and is an Adjunct Professor of Population and Family Health at

Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. Ms. Frett is a Woodrow Wilson Fellow and author of four U.N. human rights reports and manuals. She is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer and Alum of ICAP. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She holds a bachelor of arts in government and politics, a master's in public policy, and a JD from the University of Maryland.



## Patrick Holden

FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SUSTAINABLE FOOD TRUST

Patrick Holden is founder and chief executive of the Sustainable Food Trust, an organization working internationally to accelerate the transition towards more sustainable food systems. Between 1995 and 2010 he was director of the Soil Association, during which time he pioneered the development of UK and international organic standards, policy incentives for organic production and the organic market.

His policy advocacy is underpinned by his practical experience in agriculture on his 100 hectare holding, now the longest established organic dairy farm in Wales, where he produces a raw milk cheddar style cheese from his 80 native Ayrshire cows.

Mr. Holden is a frequent broadcaster and speaker, was awarded the CBE for services to organic farming in 2005 and an Ashoka Fellowship in 2016.

An event like no other of its kind, The Vanguard intends for its audience to walk away with a deeper understanding of the issues affecting women globally, not only from the perspective of academia, but also through the unfiltered voices of those most affected and unheard.



## Wingee Sampaio

GLOBAL PROGRAM DIRECTOR, CARTIER WOMEN'S INITIATIVE DIVERSITY & INCLUSION AMBASSADOR

Wingee Sampaio serves as the Global Program Director of the Cartier Women's Initiative. Founded in 2006, it is a program that supports women social impact entrepreneurs globally. She currently also serves on the

investment committee of Next Wave Ventures, a social impact venture capital fund investing in social impact early stage businesses.

She co-authored "Impact with Wings: Stories to Inspire and Mobilize Women Angel Investors and Entrepreneurs." Her chapter, "Angel Investing as Self Empowerment," aims to inspire women to use their wealth to create an impact.

Ms. Sampaio has had a distinguished career in the capital markets for 15 years at State Street Global Advisor, Barclays Global Investors, and Goldman Sachs & Co.



### **Maria Helena Semedo**

DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL, FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Maria Helena Semedo is an economist and politician from Cape Verde. With over thirty years' experience in public service, she is a recognized expert in global development issues. She has helped shape a new global narrative where sustainable agriculture is prominently recognized as a solution in addressing increasingly complex issues – from transforming agri-food systems to dealing with climate change and biodiversity loss to promoting gender equity.

Before taking up her current duties in 2013, Ms. Semedo gained valuable experience and insight in Africa, first as FAO Representative in Niger (2003-2008), then as Deputy Regional Representative for Africa and Sub-regional Coordinator for West Africa (2008-2009) and Regional Representative for Africa (2009-2013). Prior to her international career, she worked as an economist for the Cabo Verde Ministry of Planning and Cooperation before becoming Secretary of State for Fisheries, then in 1993 Minister for Fisheries, Agriculture and Rural Affairs – the first-ever woman Minister in her country. After serving as Minister for Tourism, Transportation and Marine Affairs from 1995-1998, she became a Member of Parliament, a position she held until 2003.



## Ambassador Marco Suazo

SENIOR ADVISOR TO THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
UNITAR

Ambassador Marco Suazo is a career diplomat of the Foreign Service of Honduras who served in various positions at the Permanent Mission of Honduras to the United Nations since 1990. He represented Honduras in the Security Council 1995-1996 and served as Deputy Permanent Representative until August 2015.

Ambassador Suazo presided over the work of the First and Second Committee of the General Assembly besides being an Adviser at the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) at the United Nations. He has written two publications, one for the 60th anniversary of the Organization in honor of the founder of Honduras under the title "Nuestra Historia" (Our History); in 2013 he published "We the People" in which through photography, promotes the values and richness of Honduras and also examines the participation of that country in the Organization.

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary, Ambassador Suazo is preparing his third publication dedicated to the history and documentation of Honduras in the Security Council of the United Nations. It is devoted to the history of Honduras when served to that important body under the title "Diplomacy Written."

In 2015 he was appointed Senior Advisor to the Executive Director of the UNITAR New York Office. In this role, he currently serves as Head of UNITAR's office at the United Nations in New York where he leads the main office of training with capacity building activities and knowledge sharing events whose partners include Columbia Law School, Yale University, Rey Juan Carlos I University of Spain, NGOs as well as multiple United Nations departments and specialized agencies.



## Ambassador Melanne Verveer

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GEORGETOWN INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY; CONTACT AND SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE ON GENDER ISSUES FOR THE OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP

Ambassador Verveer served as the first U.S. Ambassador for Global Women's Issues, a position to which she was nominated by President Obama in 2009. She coordinated foreign policy issues and activities relating to the political, economic and social advancement of women, traveling to nearly sixty countries and developing the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. President Obama also appointed her to serve as the U.S. Representative to the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Amb. Verveer currently serves as the Special Representative on Gender Issues for the OSCE Chairmanship.



## Shilpa Yarlagadda

FOUNDER & CEO, SHIFFON CO

Shilpa Yarlagadda is an American Entrepreneur, best known as the founder of fine jewelry company Shiffon. Ms. Yarlagadda attended Harvard University, concentrating in Computer Science with a secondary in Film/Visual Environmental Studies. She also was a Robotics Academy Intern at NASA, as well as a Research Intern at Microsoft before launching her own company.

Ms. Yarlagadda created her jewelry in her dorm room at Harvard, and wanted to start a fine jewelry brand that built social good into the fabric of the company. Shiffon donates 50% of the profits from their Duet Pinky Ring collection and 10% of profits from all other sales to fund seed grants for female entrepreneurs and startups that support female empowerment. Shiffon has experienced tremendous success with the Duet Pinky Ring as the ring has been worn by notable women including Michelle Obama, Serena Williams, and Emma Watson.



## WFI PARTNERS IN SYSTEMATIC CHANGE



**Alyssa Ahrabare**

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONSULTANT;  
PROJECT OFFICER, EUROPEAN NETWORK OF  
MIGRANT WOMEN

Alyssa Ahrabare is a 26-year-old legal expert and feminist activist from Moroccan and Algerian origins. She is Project Officer for the European Network of Migrant Women, co-organizer of Radical Girlsss (young women's movement for a global radical feminist perspective) and spokeswoman for the French non-profit organization Osez le Féminisme! ("Dare to Be Feminist"). Alyssa also founded a theatre company which uses art and pedagogy to promote equality between women and men.



**Eve Birge**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WHITE PONY EXPRESS

Eve Birge is the Executive Director at White Pony Express, a pioneering organization whose mission is to eliminate hunger and poverty by delivering the abundance to those in need – with love. As WPE's Executive Director, Ms. Birge nimbly oversees one of the largest food rescue and delivery organizations in Northern California, ensuring over 120,000 community members are food secure and have access to clothing, books, toys, and essential items. She has over 20 years' experience administering programs and policies that protect and advance the public health, education, and rights of people who are underserved. Her passion for supporting and uplifting those in need has been an ongoing theme throughout her career and she feels privileged to lead WPE as they flexibly respond to community needs.



## Rocio Cavazo

FOUNDER & MANAGING PARTNER, THE ANANDA GROUP

Rocio Cavazos is a finance and impact investing professional with over 20 years of experience in commercial and investment banking, capital markets, social investing and microfinance. She was Head of Credit at Deutsche Bank's Global Social Finance group in New York, investing in social enterprises in over 30 countries.

Previously Ms. Cavazo was CEO of Banco Amigo, a commercial bank serving the working class and microenterprise market in Mexico. She was CFO of Pro Mujer and she also worked for Women's World Banking. She was Vice President at JP Morgan in the International Debt Capital Markets group in New York and worked for the Corporate Banking Division of Banamex in Mexico.



## Kimberly Easson

FOUNDER & CEO, PARTNERSHIP FOR GENDER EQUITY

During more than twenty years working in the arena of sustainable trade and development, Kimberly Easson has dedicated herself to strengthening relationships throughout the supply chain and working with industry participants to generate win-win trading relationships that make a difference. She is the Founder and CEO of the

Partnership for Gender Equity, a US based women-led not-for-profit social enterprise focused on improving equity and sustainability along coffee, cocoa and tea supply chains.

Ms. Easson previously worked as Vice President of Strategic Partnerships and Gender Program Advisor for the Coffee Quality. As the former Director of Producer Services and Relations at Fairtrade International, she held responsibility for producer capacity building services for over one million Fairtrade producers in 63 countries and played a leadership role in the early development of the Fairtrade market in the US.

Ms. Easson is a frequent speaker at trade conferences around the world, has written numerous articles published in trade press. She served ten years as a member of the Sustainability Council of the Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA), and four

years on the Board of Directors. She is Co-Founder and past-President of the International Women's Coffee Alliance (IWCA), and Co-Founder of JavaJog for a Cause which has raised nearly \$100,000 for women in coffee farming communities.



## Adele Jones

DEPUTY CEO, SUSTAINABLE FOOD TRUST

Adele Jones is Deputy CEO at the Sustainable Food Trust. She has been with the SFT since 2013, primarily focusing on projects including true cost accounting in food and farming and the harmonisation of farm-level sustainability assessment.

In 2020, Adele undertook a part time secondment to the Welsh Government working on an annual sustainability assessment for Welsh farmers called the 'Farm Sustainability Review.' Between September 2018 – 2019 she undertook a part-time secondment with DEFRA working on a project called the 'Gold Standard Metric', which aimed to harmonise government-led farm and supply chain sustainability metrics. Previous to these roles, Ms. Jones has a background in geography and soil science.



## Natalia Wills

COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVE MEXICO, PRO MUJER

Natalia is a passionate development professional with 20 years of experience in socioeconomic development, social entrepreneurship and gender. She holds a BA in International Business (EAFIT - Medellin) and a Masters in Development Evaluation and Management (Antwerp University). In 2007 was awarded the Province of Antwerp Development Cooperation Prize. She started her career working in the marketing area of multinational corporations, however; in 2003 she decided to join the social sector. During the last 20 years she has worked for NGOs, foundations and social businesses in Colombia and Mexico, fostering grassroots economic and social development, social innovation, impact investing and gender equality. Her career has focused on the intersections between private and social sectors, where the market can be an engine for change. Natalia founded a social business (Helpmachine) and was in charge of launching Sistema B in

Mexico (b-corporation). Since 2018, she works for Pro Mujer as Mexico Country Representative, leading the organization's social impact programs in financial health, entrepreneurship and gender lens investing.



**Dr Sakena Yacoobi**

CEO, AFGHAN INSTITUTE OF LEARNING

Dr. Sakena Yacoobi is an international speaker and the CEO of the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), an organization she founded in 1995 in response to the lack of education and health care that the Afghan people faced after decades of war and strife. She is also the co-founder and President of Creating Hope International (CHI) and is a member of the U.S. Afghan Women's Council. Dr. Yacoobi has established four schools, a hospital, and a radio station in Afghanistan, and is the recipient of six honorary doctorates including from Princeton University. She serves on the advisory boards for Fetzter, Kratitz, Women's Refugee Commission, and the Social Impact Lab at Lynn University. Dr. Yacoobi was honored in 2017 with the Sunhak Peace Prize, and, in 2016, was the Harold W. McGraw Prize in Education awardee, the 2015 WISE Prize for Education Laureate and the 2013 recipient of the Opus Prize. Dr. Yacoobi is a Skoll Social Entrepreneur, Schwab Social Entrepreneur, and Ashoka Fellow, and was nominated as one of 1,000 women for the Nobel Peace Prize.

## ARTISTS



**Sallie Bingham**

WRITER, TEACHER, FEMINIST ACTIVIST AND  
PHILANTHROPIST

Sallie Bingham's first novel was published in 1961 and was followed by four collections of short stories. Her most recent book titled *The Blue Box: Three Lives in Letters*, was published in 2014. Ms. Bingham has also published six

additional novels, three collections of poetry, numerous plays and the well-known family memoir, *Passion and Prejudice*.

Ms. Bingham's stories have appeared in numerous publications and have been anthologized in *Best American Short Stories* and *The Harvard Advocate Centennial Anthology*, among others. She has received fellowships from Yaddo, the MacDowell Colony and the Virginia Center for Creative Arts.

Ms. Bingham has worked as a book editor for *The Courier-Journal* in Louisville and has been a director of the National Book Critics Circle. She is the founder of the Kentucky Foundation for Women and the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture at Duke University. She was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky and currently resides in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



## Dunya Mikhail

### IRAQI AMERICAN POET

Dunya Mikhail is an Iraqi American poet who was born in Baghdad and moved to the United States in 1996. After graduating from the University of Baghdad, she worked as a journalist and translator for *The Baghdad Observer*. Facing censorship and interrogation, she left Iraq, first to Jordan and then to America, settling in Detroit. She earned an MA at Wayne State University, and she currently teaches Arabic at Oakland University in Michigan.

Ms. Mikhail addresses themes of war, exile, and loss, using forms such as reportage, fable, and lyric. She has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, United States Artists Fellowship, a Knights Foundation grant, a Kresge Fellowship, and the United Nations Human Rights Award for Freedom of Writing. Her writing has garnered attention from *The PBS News Hour*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *Poetry*, among others.



## Hannah Rose Thomas

### ARTIST & ADVOCATE

Hannah Rose Thomas is an English artist and Durham graduate in Arabic and History, with an MA from the Prince's School of Traditional Art in London. Ms. Thomas is currently studying her PhD at Glasgow University as a UNESCO and MIDEQ Scholar.

While living in Jordan as an Arabic student in 2014, Ms. Thomas organized art projects with Syrian refugees for UNHCR. This experience led her to seek ways to combine her art and humanitarian work. Ms. Thomas subsequently began painting portraits of refugees she had met, to show the people behind the global crisis. She seeks to use art as a tool for advocacy, bringing their stories into places of influence in the Global North.

Ms. Thomas' portraits have been shown at the UK Houses of Parliament, European Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Lambeth Palace, The Saatchi Gallery and Westminster Abbey. Three of Ms. Thomas' paintings of Yezidi women were chosen by HRH The Prince of Wales for his exhibition Prince & Patron in Buckingham Palace in 2018.

Ms. Thomas has been shortlisted for the Women of the Future Award 2020 and nominated for the UN Women UK Awards 2020 and the World Humanitarian Forum Youth Changemaker Award 2020. She was selected for the Forbes 30 Under 30 2019 and The Female Lead 20 in their 20s in recognition of her work.

###



With Gratitude to the Embassy of the State of Qatar, Women Forward International's Founding Donor, for their Generous Support for this Research Project

Share on Social



[WomanForwardInternational.org](http://WomanForwardInternational.org)