

RISE AS ONE

EMPOWERING CHAMPIONS OF PEACE

WPDI GALA



RISE AS ONE

An Evening for Peace

On September 25, WPDI's Rise as One Gala brought together an exceptional group of global leaders, philanthropists, artists, supporters and changemakers at Gotham Hall in New York. Beyond celebrating a decade-plus of growth, the gathering focused on a single imperative: backing grassroots youth with the tools and funding needed to break cycles of violence.

Hosted by Forest Whitaker and emceed by Errol Barnett, CBS News anchor and U.S. national correspondent, the evening reflected a belief that has guided WPDI since its founding in 2012: youth and women can lead lasting change when they have the training, opportunities, and support to do so. Fourteen years later, our programs have reached more than 2.5 million people through our four organizational pillars: peacebuilding, livelihood, health and well-being, and sports.

From the youth panel to the inaugural WPDI Impact Awards, the evening highlighted the voices, stories, and achievements of those driving our mission forward.



YOUNG LEADERS AT THE HEART OF THE EVENING

Moderated by WPDI Board member and Visa Chief Marketing Officer Frank Cooper III, the youth panel brought together three WPDI Youth Peacemakers: Khadija Mayman from South Africa, Víctor Sántiz Garcia from Mexico, and Valentina Villarreal from California. Each described how, through WPDI's programs, they gained transformative skills to create change in their own lives and in their communities. Khadija grew up surrounded by violence in Cape Town's Cape Flats. Since joining WPDI in 2021, she has trained more than 2,000 students, alongside adult trainees, community leaders, and prison officials. Víctor saw young people leave their communities in search of opportunities. With WPDI's support, he and his brother opened a Community Learning Center in Mitontic, Chiapas, where 240 young people have received peacebuilding training. Valentina experienced bullying in elementary school. Becoming a peer mediator helped her respond to conflict and support others. Now studying psychology and communication at university, she continues to advocate for mental wellness.



HONORING ICONS OF IMPACT: LUOL DENG AND DIONNE WARWICK

The gala marked the inaugural presentation of the WPDI Impact Award, honoring NBA icon and humanitarian Luol Deng and legendary artist Dionne Warwick for their dedication to helping others.

Introducing the awards, WPDI Executive Director Caroline Descombris described the leadership they embody: “Because true leadership is not measured by what we achieve for ourselves, but by how many people we lift along the way: by the voices we amplify, the doors we open, and the opportunities we create for others to rise.”

John Prendergast presented Luol Deng’s award, while Mike Tyson, Saweetie, and Damon Elliott joined the celebration honoring Dionne Warwick.











A GLOBAL TEAM BEHIND LOCAL CHANGE

Reflecting on WPDI's beginnings, Forest Whitaker spoke about the young people who had survived conflict and were determined to help their communities recover. Their willingness to lead helped shape the organization's mission. "For WPDI, this gala is our chance to gather our global team: to share what we've learned, align our strategies, and draw strength from one another."

That commitment to local leadership shaped the evening, which also welcomed United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Amina J. Mohammed, who gave a speech on the importance of continuing to pursue peace and ensure that no person is left behind as a victim of conflict. Bringing young peacemakers together with institutional partners, artists, and supporters underscored how much this work depends on people contributing their time, knowledge, and resources.











TURNING GENEROSITY INTO OPPORTUNITY

Led by auctioneer Harry Santa-Olalla, the live auction featured an exceptional selection of experiences and works of art generously donated by our partners. From exclusive cultural and travel experiences to one-of-a-kind offerings, the auction brought guests together in support of WPDI's mission to build peace and create opportunities for communities affected by violence.

Alongside the live auction, the silent auction brought together travel, entertainment, cinema memorabilia, fine art, and wellness experiences.

We would like to thank everyone who donated an item, placed a bid, or contributed to the evening. Their generosity and support help sustain the everyday work of our teams: training young peacebuilders, supporting entrepreneurs, bringing divided communities into dialogue, and helping people heal.







THE POWER OF MUSIC TO UNITE FOR PEACE

Music brought its own energy to the gathering, with Rockers on the Rise and Broadway Bound Kids performing “I Wish” through a partnership with Ken Freirich’s Random Acts of Kindness.

The evening also featured “One Heart Can Change the World,” a collaboration by Dionne Warwick and Saweetie, with narration by Forest Whitaker, alongside a contribution by sound healer Ana Netanel. The highlight was a moving violin performance by Grammy Award-winning violinist and UN Goodwill Ambassador Miri Ben-Ari, whose artistry brought the song’s message of peace and unity to life.

THANK YOU FOR STANDING WITH US

We extend our sincere thanks to Visa, WWT, BNP Paribas, the Starkey Hearing Foundation, and Ken Freirich's Random Acts of Kindness, alongside our auction donors, Board members, performers, guests, and partners.

We are equally grateful to the WPDI teams and young peacemakers whose work continues long after the evening ends, and to everyone in our wider community who helps make that work possible. In Forest Whitaker's own words: "Thank you for believing in WPDI, and for standing shoulder to shoulder with us as we Rise as One."

Your support carries that commitment into classrooms, businesses, and communities around the world. Stay inspired and connected. Subscribe to our newsletter for updates and stories: www.wpdi.org/newsletter/

KEEP THE SPIRIT OF RISE AS ONE, GOING.

Your gift helps young people build peace, develop new skills, and create opportunities in their communities. Help carry the energy of this year's gala into the work ahead.

DONATE NOW

