

## EVENT REPORT: EIFDDA's Celebration of #WIHW2025

### TOPIC: "Strengthening Pathways to Interfaith Peace and Social Cohesion"

#### PREAMBLE



**Ethiopia's Context and Challenges:** Ethiopia's rich religious and cultural diversity is both strength and a challenge. Our country grapples with persistent interfaith tensions, socio-political instability, and rising ethnic conflicts. Youth, crucial to peacebuilding, are often marginalized, increasing their vulnerability to radicalization. Gender inequality and climate change further threaten stability, while state control over religious institutions limits their autonomy. Escalating religious tensions disproportionately affects minority groups, exacerbating discrimination.



**Ethiopian Interfaith Forum for Development, Dialogue, and Action (EIFDDA):** Founded in 2002, EIFDDA emerged in response to Ethiopia's deep-seated ethnic and religious divisions. Bringing together Christian, Muslim, and Bahá'í faith leaders, EIFDDA fosters interfaith dialogue as a tool for sustainable development and social harmony. By leveraging the unique strengths of faith communities (over 97% of the population adheres to one or another religion in Ethiopia); EIFDDA transforms potential conflicts into opportunities for multi-faith collaboration, addressing interethnic and religious conflicts and social inequality.



**Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action (JISRA) Program:** A flagship initiative under EIFDDA, JISRA champions interfaith collaboration, youth and gender inclusion, and community-driven peacebuilding. By empowering local actors to be prime advocates of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), JISRA directly tackles the root causes of conflict. Its grassroots approach has yielded crucial insights for policy development, fostering inclusive, just, and peaceful communities where all voices are valued.

**EIFDDA's Engagement with #WIHW2025:** This year, EIFDDA leveraged the #WIHW2025 celebration to strengthen interfaith peace, multi-faith collaboration, youth inclusion, and climate action by faith communities. Through dialogues, community engagement, and advocacy, EIFDDA united religious leaders, government entities, and grassroots faith platforms to foster mutual understanding, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship. More than a celebration, it became a catalyst for sustained action, reinforcing a collective commitment to peace, resilience, and sustainable development."

**Key Highlights of #WIHW2025 Events:** Between January 30 – February 28, 2025, four transformative events brought together faith leaders, youth, and community members, sparking dialogue that led to tangible outcomes and fostering lasting unity across conflict-prone areas. EIFDDA, partner FBOs, local platforms, and other stakeholders collaborated to convene celebration activities, which have laid the groundwork for lasting peace through shared stories, unity, and grassroots action!

- Community Action for Peace (Ambo - February 5th, 2025)
- Town Hall for Peace (Holeta – February 28, 2025)
- Youth Peacebuilding Training (Addis Ababa & Zeway – Jan 30 to Feb 3, 2025)
- Roundtable & Panel Discussion: Your Story, Our Peace (Addis Ababa – February 7, 2025)

**The Event Report:** EIFDDA captured key moments through photos, interviews, and testimonials, highlighting the events' potential impact and outcomes. Through the use of proceedings, outcome harvesting, and the PMEAL framework for data collection, EIFDDA ensured accurate insights and continuous improvement in future activities. These efforts have laid the foundation for sustainable engagement through ongoing partnerships and community-based actions. We invite you to explore through four events convened to celebrate #wihw2025 below:

- 1- **Community Action for Peace (Ambo - February 5<sup>th</sup> 2025): Tree planting and supporting youth sports symbolized growth, leadership, and unity, with grassroots efforts strengthening interfaith collaboration and inclusion.**



**PHOTO: Celebration of #wihw2025: Community Gathering -Tree Planning and promoting inclusion initiative, Ambo, Feb 2025**

The Community Action for Peace event in Ambo highlighted the dual focus on environmental sustainability and social inclusion, with the tree planting initiative at its core. This event brought together community members, leaders, and youth in a collective effort to plant over 25 trees, symbolizing unity and a shared responsibility for the environment. Local leaders took the lead in planting and watering the trees, demonstrating their commitment to environmental

stewardship and be exemplary for local community. The event was part of JISRA's larger effort to introduce faith-based environmental action, tying in with the #WIHW2025 celebration theme, "Uniting in Faith: Climate Action for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future."



The event successfully mobilized local leaders and community members to engage in tangible actions for climate change and peacebuilding. By planting trees, the community not only contributed to environmental sustainability but also set an example of collective action for future generations. The involvement of marginalized youth, including those with hearing impairments from Lazarith Cathedral School, helped foster greater inclusion and a sense of shared purpose.

As a leader said, *"This is an ideal and symbolic act of planting trees. It creates lasting memories for all participants. We are committed to planting more trees and caring for them in the years to come, thanks for the support from EIFDDA."*

The sustainability of the tree planting initiative is ensured through ongoing engagement with local leaders, community members, and youth. The trees symbolize both environmental care and the community's commitment to peace and inclusion. EIFDDA will collaborate with JISRA's local platforms to maintain the trees and expand the initiative, with local leaders continuing to champion its long-term impact.



During the event, EIFDDA supported the Supporting Sports for Peace Initiative by presenting football materials to benefit both deaf and non-deaf youth. This initiative promotes inclusion and peace through collaborative sports, including marginalized youth. By providing essential materials, EIFDDA ensures the continuation of these games, which foster interfaith collaboration and youth leadership.

Photo: JISRA presents sports materials to enhance efforts in peacebuilding, teamwork, and inspiring future generations. Ambo Town, April 2024

Both initiatives—tree planting and

sports for peace—are interwoven with EIFDDA’s long-term vision of sustainable community-driven peace, inclusion, and environmental stewardship. The combination of environmental care and youth-led initiatives for peace will continue to inspire positive change, ensuring lasting unity and growth. See link below for previous event:

<https://x.com/EifddaForYou/status/1796581459907477532>

**2- Town Hall for Peace (Holeta – February 28, 2025): Advocacy Network Groups held discussions on unity, tolerance, and FoRB, with media amplifying the message of peace and coexistence.**



*Group Photo at Holleta, Feb 2025*

EIFDDA hosted the "Sustaining the Culture of Peace" event in Holleta City as part of #WIHW2025, bringing together over 40 diverse faith leaders, community members, and peace representatives. The event promoted interfaith dialogue, social cohesion, and community-driven peacebuilding, reinforcing EIFDDA's commitment to multi-faith collaboration and bridging religious differences for local conflict resolution.

The event featured town hall discussions, dialogue sessions, and workshops aimed at strengthening interfaith harmony and promoting sustainable peace. Participants explored ways to integrate faith-based and extra-religious approaches to conflict



resolution and developed strategies for long-term peace.



The event reinforced the idea that peacebuilding must be locally led and rooted in community traditions. Key reflections included the importance of empowering women and youth in peace efforts, the need for ongoing, community-driven peace processes, and the critical role of media in spreading positive peace messages. To ensure lasting impact, the local Advocacy Network Groups with government peace and security structures agreed on several steps to institutionalize faith-based and community-led peace

structures, strengthen multi-faith collaboration for conflict prevention, and expand media involvement in peace campaigns. They also committed to ongoing capacity-building for women, youth, and community leaders. The event marked a significant step toward sustainable peace. EIFDDA and JISRA will continue to support interfaith collaboration, capacity-building, and media engagement to ensure long-term peacebuilding in the region.

The #WIHW2025 events have demonstrated the power of unity, collaboration, and dialogue in addressing Ethiopia's social challenges. From empowering marginalized communities to promoting interfaith peacebuilding and harmony, these events have laid a strong foundation for lasting progress. The commitment from participants signals a shared dedication to peace, inclusivity, and justice.



### **3- Youth Peacebuilding Training (Addis Ababa & Zeway– Jan 30 to Feb 3, 2025): Talented Youth leaders engaged in peacebuilding workshops, harnessing creative arts for unity, interfaith dialogue, and collaboration.**

This event positioned youth as key drivers of peacebuilding and FoRB advocates. Through interactive activities, it equipped participants with skills in social cohesion, advocacy, and artistic expression.

The first activity, a capacity-building workshop on January 30 at the Catholic Cathedral School in Addis Ababa, brought together youth leaders to explore conflict resolution, religious tolerance, and human rights, with expert facilitators guiding discussions on using art for peacebuilding..



At the



*#WIHW2025 training, youth gained the knowledge and skills to drive change through their creative artworks and exhibitions, fostering dialogue and collaboration for a more peaceful world.*

*A powerful moment of connection at the #WIHW2025 training workshop—hands clasped, hearts open, and minds united. These diverse young leaders build trust and relationships for the common good!*



*Photo: Youth working on their creative peace building artistic works, 2024*



*Photo: Youth collaboratively incorporated the JISRA and WIHW logos into their artwork, symbolizing unity, peace, and shared commitment to interfaith harmony in 2024.*

Building on the first day, a **retreat in Zeway on January 31** provided an immersive space for participants to transform their reflections into over 20 pieces of artwork focused on peace, coexistence, and unity. The retreat fostered collaboration, deepened interfaith dialogue, and inspired youth to use visual storytelling as a tool for promoting peace in their communities.



*Photo: Transforming peacebuilding knowledge into vibrant art, youth gather at Zeway Lake to display their creative resilience. At the heart of their works, the JISRA and WIHW logos shine, symbolizing unity and shared purpose, with each piece telling a unique story of hope and emotion. 2024*

One youth said that: *"Zeway allowed me to step back and think deeply. It was not just about creating art—it was about expressing my vision of a peaceful Ethiopia. These artworks are not just for me, but for everyone who believes in peace."*

The momentum culminated in an **art exhibition in Indibir Cathedral School, on April 1**, held in a conflict-prone JISRA project zone. The event attracted

over **3,000 visitors on its opening day**, including students, educators, faith leaders, and community members. Through their artwork and personal stories, youth sparked conversations about peace and reconciliation, demonstrating how art can be a powerful tool for advocacy.

This ongoing effort will amplify the lasting impact of youth-driven collaboration and creative advocacy, reinforcing EIFDDA's commitment to empowering young changemakers in advancing peace and religious freedom.

Extending beyond #WIHW2025, the initiative aims to reach 20,000 people across JISRA's conflict-prone areas in the next two quarters, further empowering youth to shape inclusive, harmonious communities.



Photos: Art Exhibition visited by Students at [Iddibir Catholic school](#), 2024



Photo: Religious leader remarks during closing ceremony at Iddibir Cathedral School 2024

The #WIHW2025 movement has had a profound impact, empowering young people as peacebuilders and leaders. Through workshops, retreats, and art exhibitions, youth have showcased resilience and the importance of peace. As EIFDDA moves forward, we remain committed to amplifying youth voices and ensuring their role in shaping Ethiopia's future peace, one artist at a time.

A religious leader attending the exhibition remarked, *"This event shows that peace is not just a concept but something tangible. These young artists are leading a movement that will continue to inspire generations."*



Group Photo: At the #WIHW2025 training workshop, diverse youth come together to create lasting relationships for peace and the common good. January 2025

4- Roundtable & Panel Discussion: Your Story, Our Peace (Addis Ababa – February 7, 2025): Faith leaders, scholars, and community representatives gathered to share personal stories interfaith collaboration and understanding.

On February 7th, 2025, the #WIHW2025 panel and roundtable, under the theme "Your Story, Our Peace," brought together faith leaders, youth activists, and scholars to foster dialogue on religious intolerance, youth spirituality, gender equality, and interfaith relationships.

The event featured a panel discussion where speakers emphasized the transformative potential of faith communities.

**Ustaza Fatuma** stressed the importance of interfaith collaboration to address gender disparities and promote girls' education.



Photo: Opening Prayer, Bahia's Center, Feb 2025



**Lealem**, a youth activist, called on young people to embrace purpose-driven lives and community service.

**Musliha Bereket** shared her personal journey in advocating against child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) through Islamic principles.

**Mr. Yilma Hirpa** highlighted JISRA's accomplishments in implementing the Marrakesh Declaration and promoting interfaith cooperation.

The panel highlighted the significant role of faith-based leadership in tackling issues such as education, gender justice, and interfaith collaboration, leaving attendees motivated to foster a more inclusive and equitable society.



"The resonance of stories, echoing in the hearts of attentive listeners—a moment of profound connection"





Following the panel presentation and discussion, in the **roundtable discussions**, participants shared personal stories of interfaith collaboration, reflecting on shared aspirations for peace, discussed key issues such as **gender equality, social justice, and religious tolerance, emphasizing the transformative power of faith-based engagement.**

**Justice, equality, and freedom of religion were central to the dialogue.** Kenzia, a Muslim participant, shared, "Justice motivates me to continue following my religion and advocate for equality." **Tofiq**, also Muslim, added, "There is no compulsion in religion. We should respect each other's beliefs." Youth

empowerment was highlighted as crucial, with **Lealem** stressing, "Youth must embrace purpose-driven lives and community service." **Gender equality** was a key focus, with several participants addressing harmful practices like FGM and child marriage. **Zahara**, a Muslim participant, shared, "I work with my religion to support women suffering from FGM." **Blen**, a Bahá'í, emphasized love as a universal principle, stating, "I



**"From listening to speaking, a journey of understanding begins. Embrace the power of stories to build bridges of peace."**

find love in nature, God, and others." **Ahadu**, another Bahá'í, spoke on the importance of unity across religious divides, remarking: "Living separately is impossible, like body parts functioning alone."

The event demonstrated the power of faith-based collaboration in tackling critical societal challenges. Participants left the event feeling inspired to champion justice, gender equality, and interfaith dialogue within their communities. Many committed to establishing local interfaith youth groups, organizing community workshops on gender-based violence, and initiating educational programs promoting religious tolerance in schools.



**Group Photo, Your Story Our Peace, Feb 2025**

**As we reflect on these efforts, we recognize that the seeds of peace are planted, but it is up to all of us to nurture and sustain them. EIFDDA remains committed to building on this momentum, ensuring a just and peaceful future for Ethiopia.**

**Our Message:**

*On behalf of EIFDDA, we extend warm greetings from Ethiopia! This report highlights our #WIHW2025 celebration, emphasizing our commitment to interfaith relationships, youth empowerment, gender equality, and community resilience. We thank our partners and local faith platforms for their invaluable support and look forward to continuing this important work.*

*NOTE: To highlight the impact and reach of our work, EIFDDA prioritizes visibility and dissemination activities through platforms such as social media, events, and publications. These efforts are key to raising awareness, fostering engagement, and ensuring the sustainability of our initiatives, helping to strengthen connections with stakeholders and expand support for our mission.*

*Explore more in the links here:*

- **Website:** [www.eifdda.org](http://www.eifdda.org)
- **Email:** [eifdda.foryou@gmail.com](mailto:eifdda.foryou@gmail.com)
- **Twitter-** <https://twitter.com/EifddaForyou>
- **Facebook-** <https://www.facebook.com/eifdda/>

*With kind regards,*

Prepared and submitted by: Yilma Hirpa Bour  
JISRA Coordinator, EIFDDA  
Phone: +251940441215 (WhatsApp/Telegram)  
Email: [yilmaboru@gmail.com](mailto:yilmaboru@gmail.com)

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