MEPI Interfaith Conference in Jerusalem

Leadership Conferences

Clergy Conference

Europe-Eurasia Cooperation
From the Publisher

This issue of UPF Today offers a wide range of reports that illustrate the impressive ongoing development of UPF around the world and its increasing capacity to contribute to peacebuilding efforts in a variety of contexts, in the north, south, east and west.

UPF continues its focus on promoting peace in the Middle East, with special emphasis on resolving the conflict in Syria that has cost the lives of 130,000 people and the displacement of millions. Following up on its special consultation in Amman, Jordan, in October of last year, UPF convened important peace conferences in both Jerusalem and Geneva, with the latter running concurrent with the “Geneva II” talks in January. UPF’s program was entitled “Geneva Track II,” and consensus was achieved to encourage a variety of soft-power approaches to peace and more multi-track diplomacy by faith-based organizations, civil society NGOs, women and youth.

The Jerusalem interfaith conference, which was complemented by a Religious Youth Service program, demonstrate UPF’s ongoing commitment to a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian standoff.

Thank you for your ongoing interest in the work of UPF around the world, and thank you for your support.

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Cover:
Participants in the MEPI Interfaith Conference in Jerusalem; (Inset pictures) meeting of US and Caribbean leaders in Miami, USA; launching the Asian Clergy Leadership Conference in Manila, Philippines; and conference in Paris promoting European and Eurasian cooperation.
MEPI Interfaith Conference in Jerusalem

By Dr. Nurit Hirschfeld, Director, Jerusalem Forum for Interfaith and Cooperation for Peace

UPF held an international conference in Jerusalem Dec. 19-22, 2013 on the topic of “Interreligious and International Relations in the Middle East: Toward Peace and Stability.” On the backdrop of sunny winter days that followed a blizzard, some 45 scholars, religious leaders, diplomats, geopolitical experts and NGO activists from five continents and 22 countries converged in search for solutions to the conflict in the Middle East. The discussions dealt with the current situation in the Middle East from broad perspectives and diverse points of view.

UPF’s Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) supports peace efforts in the region through open dialogues, religious pilgrimages and peace tourism in Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Dr. Chang Shik Yang, chairman of the Universal Peace Federation International, who led numerous MEPI delegations, noted that the conference marked the tenth anniversary of the Middle East Peace Initiative of UPF in Israel and Palestine, during which time more than 50 international delegations visited Israel and Palestine. He expressed his deepest hope that UPF’s MEPI programs can make a significant contribution to peace to the Holy Land: “I have the greatest love and respect for all my Jewish, Christian and Muslim brothers and sisters. I want to see the day when we can live together in peace, harmony and cooperation, like one family; one family under God.”

Dr. Thomas Walsh, president of UPF International, underscored the need for increased coordination among experts in international relations with experts in interreligious relations. Professor Eliezer Glaubach, a former elected member of the City Council of Jerusalem, expressed his gratitude as a citizen of Jerusalem for this initiative which brought to Jerusalem thousands of Ambassadors for Peace even in times of international isolation.

While the roots of the conflict in the land of Israel and Palestine are complex and labyrinthine, one can only wonder what might be possible if relations among Jews, Christians and Muslims were vastly improved. Participants offered their wisdom on the relevance of interfaith cooperation for peace in Israel and Palestine.

RELIGION IN THE SEARCH FOR PEACE

Mr. George E. Stephan, the regional internal auditor of the Middle East Council of Churches Department of Services to Palestinian Refugees, based his appeal for peace on Christian values: “From a small grotto in Bethlehem a message of love, hope, justice and peace was spread all over the world. For us Christians, the

“Religious peace can support the political peace.”

- Rabbi Michael Melchior, former minister for Social Affairs and Diaspora, Israel
Infant baby is the Prince of Peace and His message is one of reaching out with love, compassion, understanding and forgiveness. Indeed the need for a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a big challenge. And yet it the responsibility of each and every one of us to make peace through acknowledging the other and through seeing his story, his fear and his hope…. Despite injustices, we carry the message of Jesus Christ in our hearts, to overcome voices of hatred and despair. Despite the hardships we are facing, we have the obligation to look into the future with hope and with open eyes.”

Dr. William McComish from Switzerland reported about the Geneva Spiritual Appeal. The document included a refusal to invoke a religious or spiritual power to justify violence, discrimination and exclusion, and a refusal to exploit or dominate others by means of strength, intellectual capacity or spiritual persuasion, wealth or social status. It was signed in Geneva on United Nations Day in 1999 by religious leaders of many religions and people from civil society.

Rabbi Michael Melchior, a former minister for Social Affairs and Diaspora in the Israeli government, talked about his involvement in the January 2002 conference in Alexandria, Egypt where, in the midst of the second Intifada, Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders gathered in a common interreligious effort for peace. They signed a declaration in which they called for putting an end to any kind of incitement and bloodshed in the name of religion.

Rabbi Melchior noted that traditional diplomacy, despite the good will of many from around the world, has failed to bring peace to the Middle East. The basic agreement has been on the table for a long time, and the will exists from both sides to reach a peaceful solution. “Why then,” he asked, “are we not getting there? We must ask ourselves what went wrong in all the previous attempts.” According to Melchior the concept has been wrong, since the efforts were made to attain a secular peace. All attempts excluded the religious element in hope they would disappear. But they didn’t disappear and toppled down all peace efforts. He called for a religious peace because it stems from the belief in one God and is built upon values and justice, and not upon interests. “Religious peace can support the political peace,” he said.

Rev. Chang Shik Yang talked about the vision of UPF’s founder, Father Sun Myung Moon, who believed sincerely that the fate of the world was directly related to the unity of the Abrahamic religions. If religious division persists, then conflicts will prevail not only on the level of religious doctrines but also on the political and military levels. In other words, peace cannot be achieved on the political level until peace is achieved on the spiritual level. Thus, he underscored the point that interfaith dialogue is absolutely needed as one of the major tools to create a stable and substantial foundation for peace.

It is not enough to teach the words of the holy scriptures; we must live according to them.

Mr. Emmanuel Chouraqui, a filmmaker from Beamlight in France, is a son of André Chouraqui, who translated the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Qur’an into French and was one of the first activists in Jerusalem in the field of interfaith understanding. Inspired by his father’s legacy, Mr. Chouraqui shared his understanding that the holy scriptures ultimately convey one and the same message, which is that humankind is one family whose members, created in the image of the Creator, should respect one another, love their neighbors as themselves, and forsake wars and violence of all kinds.

Sheik Shafayat Mohamed of the Darul Uloom Islamic Institute in the US called upon all religious people to apply their holy scriptures. “If we live according to our holy scriptures peace would be easily achieved,” he claimed. “Jews and Muslims are brothers: offspring of Ishmael and Isaac. They
are family members. They should naturally love and respect one another,” he said, referring to Rev. Sun Myung Moon’s vision of “one family under God.” Dr. Rouchdy Saleh Hassan from Egypt said that he is applying this attitude in his life. He stressed the need for unity among the Abrahamic religions and indicated that when asked about his own religious preference, he is often inclined to respond: “Abrahamic.”

Dr. Michael W. Jenkins, a member of the UPF’s MEPI Steering Committee, explored in depth the call to live according to the holy scriptures: scriptures teach that we should respect and love the other; external efforts are not effective if our hearts don’t resonate with this value. “If I, as a Christian, go to a mosque and hug a sheikh and go to a synagogue and hug a rabbi, but come home and tell my wife that actually I don’t really like this sheikh and the rabbi was not as polite to me as I expected him to be, then my external efforts would not bear meaningful fruits.”

RELIGIONS AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS SHOULD CHALLENGE THEMSELVES.

Rabbi Reuven Khaskin pointed out that religion is often used as the main driving force of hatred, animosity and conflict. If so, “How can we, religious leaders, bring that change, and bridge the gap of animosity and mutual distrust?” he asked. His answer was that while religious leaders represent different faiths and religious traditions, all share a common understanding that humankind was created in the image of God. Rabbi Khaskin quoted the former chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth Lord Jonathan Sacks: “Can I recognize God’s image in someone who is not in my image, whose language, faith, ideals, are different from mine? If I cannot, then I have made God in my image instead of allowing him to remake me in his.”

Rev. Hjortur Magni Johannsson, head minister of the Free Lutheran Church in Iceland, commented on his disappointment with fundamentalism and religious extremism. He sees religious triumphalism, be it Jewish, Christian or Islamic, as an expression of insecurity. Pure religion should be about peaceful communication in love and respect. Religion should be about communicating with the “other” (as the philosopher Martin Buber defined the term), those who are on the other side of the wall.

In light of the challenges of fundamentalism and fanaticism, Rev. Johannsson suggested the need for new paradigms; new ways of understanding and living out our particularities in the midst of pluralism: “We need to be inclusive not exclusive, tolerant not judgmental, preferring compassion, and mercy rather than strict righteousness legalism or harsh punishment. All of this is summed up by Father Moon’s high and beautiful ideal of living for the sake of others.”

“I have the greatest love and respect for all my Jewish, Christian and Muslim brothers and sisters. I want to see the day when we can live together in peace, harmony and cooperation, like one family; one family under God.”

– Dr. Chang Shik Yang, Chairman, Universal Peace Federation
Religious Youth Service Project in Jerusalem

by UPF-Israel

Jerusalem hills were covered with snow when the 42 Religious Youth Service (RYS) participants arrived from five continents and 15 different nations around the world. They were welcomed by roadside white slopes, the blue sky of sunny winter days and caring Israeli staff. The international program in Jerusalem (Dec. 18-23, 2013) was conducted by Koriel Ben Zvi and Liel Shmueli, leaders of RYS-Israel, with the dedicated support of senior advisors Mrs. Rosa Shmueli and Mrs. Miri Kamar.

The young, high-spirited leaders came to the Holy Land in order to closely study the complexity of the geopolitical reality in Israel and gain a better understanding of people’s hearts, both Israelis and Palestinians.

As a mixed group of young people from different backgrounds, the interaction among the group members created a special opportunity to get to know the other: people of other languages, religions and cultures. Warm, new friendships were created and went beyond the national and religious differences.

INTERFAITH

The first day focused on interfaith understanding. The group walked through the Old City of Jerusalem and visited holy sites of three Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, experiencing first-hand the various traditions. Visits to the holy places were guided by local people: a Jewish rabbi for the Jewish sites and a Muslim resident of East Jerusalem for the Islamic sites. Meeting the local people contributed a deeper dimension to the experience.

The group walked through the Via Dolorosa and concluded at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, marking the place where Jesus was crucified and buried. Some people had emotional experiences as they traced the last steps of Jesus and listened to descriptions of his attitude of love and forgiveness under the miserable circumstances.

INTERFAITH AND LEADERSHIP

The second day began at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and featured two panels of experts. The first panel was dedicated to the Need for Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation, and the second panel introduced the Geo-Political Realities in the Middle East. Among the high-level panelists were theologians, diplomats, journalists, local government officials and human rights advocates. The young people could learn a lot from the fascinating and inspiring lectures. They asked the experts wise and challenging questions.
The panels were moderated and coordinated by Mrs. Adi Sasaki, director of UPF’s Jerusalem Peace and Security Forum, and by Dr. Nurit Hirschfeld, director of UPF’s Jerusalem Interfaith Forum.

The day continued with sightseeing and unforgettable views of the Old City from one of the mountains surrounding it. On Friday afternoons, the streets of Jerusalem have special atmosphere of holiness in preparation for the Jewish Sabbath. The group experienced a special welcoming of the Sabbath in a Reform synagogue. Even though the prayers were recited in Hebrew, the guests could sense a reverent and welcoming atmosphere.

**LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE**

The program on Saturday included a service project which was coordinated and sensitively guided by Mrs. Miri Kamar, secretary general of UPF-Israel. The group visited Isawie, an Arab village located on the east side of Jerusalem to spend time at a school which provides special education for children with mental limitations and other problems. Divided into small groups, the young people engaged the interests of the children through a variety of activities. The interaction with the students was a special experience through which they could learn to accept other people regardless of their backgrounds and differences.

The second part of the day was hosted by the University of Beit Hanina, an Arab town near Jerusalem. In a panel presentation dedicated to the subject of Democratic Values in Middle East Tribal Society, they met a woman lawyer who gave her perspective on Palestine as an independent country, and another expert who shared insights into the history of the Middle East. In a session of questions and answers, Arab students shared their perspectives and feelings regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

**SPECIAL CONCLUDING EVENTS**

On Saturday evening, the youth participated in a banquet celebrating the tenth anniversary of the UPF Middle East Peace Initiative. The youth mingled in with the older guests, who were filled with hope by seeing young dedicated people conversing with them about peacebuilding and listening to their vision and thoughts.

Early in the morning of the final day (Sunday), the group took part in a walk through the streets of the Old City, in a peace march which has been a traditional part of the Middle East Peace Initiative trips. Some of the participants had touching experiences during the march.

The next site was Yad Vashem, the national holocaust museum of Israel, where the group went on a tour which ended with a session of questions and answers with the guide about the holocaust. The visit to Yad Vashem was followed by listening to the experiences of a former Israeli Defense Forces soldier. She was serving in the army during times of fighting in the southern part of Israel, and she described her experiences commanding soldiers during that time. Being raised according to values of peace throughout her life, she talked about how challenging it was to find herself in a situation of war.

**REFLECTIONS BY PARTICIPANTS**

For Anita Chandel from the UK, participating in the program was a remarkable experience: “This trip, both the outward and inward journey, has left me feeling grateful, appreciative of what I have, hopeful for what is to come, and confident that I can make a difference in the lives of others…. I have returned from Jerusalem with a greater desire to be of assistance to others and the belief that I can make a positive difference in the world. This journey has been rewarding, beautiful, inspiring and unforgettable. The memories are priceless and shall be cherished forever.”

“RYS and the Youth UPF made me feel very welcome and accepted even though I don’t belong to any faith in particular,” said Julien Bernard Grau from the UK, pointing by that to the success of the program. “The Middle East Peace Initiative is doing great work, and learning about the work they do was inspirational. This has left a warm feeling of support and hope for world peace the future.”

The program ended with certifications of appreciation presented by international and local UPF and RYS leaders.

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- Anita Chandel, UK
UPF convened a special program entitled “Geneva: Track 2” in Geneva, Switzerland Jan. 23-25, 2014, concurrent with the “Geneva II” inter-governmental conference that aimed to bring about a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Syria. The theme for the consultation was “Toward Peace and Reconciliation in Syria: The Significance of Religion, Faith-Based Organizations and Civil Society.”

The tragic and devastating consequences of the war in Syria, both in terms of the loss of life and the millions of displaced persons, are giving rise to a humanitarian disaster of epic proportion. UPF applauds the efforts of the United Nations, the United States, Russia and the participating nations, and sought to offer support for the success of Geneva II.

Following the recommendations of UPF’s Amman consultation in October 2013 and the Jerusalem consultation in December 2013, UPF convened the Track 2 conference in Geneva to assist the daunting task of the Geneva II talks on the Syrian conflict. The intention in convening a wide variety of spiritual and religious leaders, as well as academicians, civil society representatives, women and youth, was to supplement the “track 1” initiative of Geneva II, with a “track 2” program that underscored the need to engage religious and spiritual leaders, faith-based organizations and a variety of civil society organizations in the pursuit of peace.

The consultation included a high-level segment of faith leaders, scholars and other stakeholders who deliberated on the current crisis in Syria, including the wider geopolitical context, and considering the role which religion, civil society, women and faith-based organizations can play in restoring peace and order in Syria.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The religious and NGO leaders from various countries supported international diplomatic effort to bring together representatives of the conflicting sides in Syria and encouraged the sides of the conflict to continue direct talks despite all difficulties they may face. They called on the participants in Geneva II to move towards implementation of the Geneva Communiqué and also reminded political and military leaders of the conflicting sides of their personal responsibility of adhering to basic human rights standards and human security needs of the civilian population in Syria.

The UPF Track 2 conference discussed a Seven-Point Plan for Peace, Reconciliation and Humanitarian Reconstruction for Syria, which included, as follows:

- call for all journalists to be effectively involved in the peace, humanitarian aid and reconciliation process
- call for all women to reunite across all boundaries and to participate in the humanitarian, reconstruction and peacebuilding process
- call for all communities across civil society to reunite and to commence the rebuilding effort
- call for the reconstruction of food corridors to enable humanitarian aid and food to be provided to all women, children and families
- call for the establishment of medical humanitarian aid to facilitate humanitarian relief to all women and children
- call for all women, children and families who are refugees to be granted access to safety and protection as a fundamental human right
- call for the protection of all women and children as a fundamental human right

Track 2 consultation on peace in Syria
INTERFAITH PROGRAM AT ST. PETER’S CATHEDRAL

An interfaith program at St. Peter’s Cathedral featured a variety of spiritual and religious voices, interfaith prayers for peace and artistic performances. The program was as follows:

- Greetings by Rev. Emmanuel Rolland, pastor, and Dr. William McComish, pastor and president of the Geneva Spiritual Appeal
- Reading in French of the Geneva Spiritual Appeal by Mrs. Tatjana Darany, director general of the Geneva Foundation
- Prayer in French by Mr. Shady Amman, a Syrian in Switzerland
- Reading in English of the Geneva Spiritual Appeal by Mr. Walter Gyger, ambassador of Switzerland
- Prayer in English by Rt. Rev. Riah Hanna Abu El-Assa, Anglican bishop of Jerusalem and the Near East
- Message by Rabbi François Garai of the Israelite community of Geneva, read by Mr. Hafid Ouardiri, director of the Fondation de l’Entre-Connaissance
- Prayer in Arabic by Shi’ite Imam Sheik Mohamad Ali Al-Hajj, from Lebanon, translated into French
- Reading of the Geneva Spiritual Appeal by Dr. Tawfik Chamaa, a Syrian in Switzerland
- Prayer in English by Sunni Imam Sheik Mohamad Al-Habash, from Syria
- Prayer in Arabic by Yazan Savoy, a Syrian in Switzerland
- Prayer by Mrs. Danièle Bianchi, Baha’i community of Geneva
- Message by Mr. Gary Vachicouras, Orthodox Christian community of Geneva
- Benediction by Msgr. Pierre Farine, auxiliary bishop of Lausanne, Geneva and Fribourg, Roman Catholic Church
- Collection of funds for the Union of Syrian Medical Relief Organizations

INVITATION TO A VATICAN CONSULTATION

UPF’s president Dr. Thomas G. Walsh, along with the secretary general of UPF-Argentina (Pope Francis’ native country), Miguel Werner, were invited to attend a special consultation at the Vatican on Jan. 13 on the topic of “Syria: Can We Remain Indifferent?”

This consultation was organized by the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Sciences to help draft a statement for Pope Francis to offer the “Geneva II” meeting of political leaders on the crisis in Syria, which took place in Geneva, Switzerland, soon afterwards.

Participants included an Egyptian Nobel Peace Prize winner, a US economist, a Russian diplomat, a Lebanese expert on politics, a Spanish diplomat, and a French economist.

A report about the program may be found at www.pas.va, including a statement submitted to Pope Francis, which recommended an immediate end to violence, distribution of humanitarian aid, dialogue among all sides and beginning to rebuild the country.
A conference on “Eurasia and Europe: Cooperating for a Culture of Peace and Human Development” took place in Paris, France, Dec. 3-4, 2013, calling attention to the new “Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures” that was inaugurated in August 2013 at the request of Kazakhstan and which is now being spearheaded by UNESCO.

Dr. Chang Shik Yang, chairman of UPF, spoke at the opening session about a vision of Europe and Eurasia coming together in closer understanding and exploring ways of partnering. The opening session featured the former director-general of UNESCO (1987-1999) H.E. Dr Federico Mayor, known for his advocacy of the “Culture of Peace” which he promoted while he was director-general, who offered a videotaped message in support of the conference.

Issues of Eurasia-Europe cooperation were timely, with two speakers from former Soviet republics that have been making steps towards connecting with the European Union’s Eastern Partnership. Former president of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk was unable to attend due to the ongoing crisis in Ukraine over its relationship with Russia vs. the European Union, but he sent his press secretary to read his speech for him.

He gave an overview of the political, interfaith and inter-ethnic predicaments that Ukraine faced during his presidency (1992-1994), with the collapse of the Soviet Union and during the first years of statehood. In spite of these challenges, Ukraine “avoided bloodshed and preserved the territorial integrity of the state,” he reported.

“It is the culture of peace,” he concluded, “that makes the necessary foundation for rapprochement and dialogue of cultures in general and the cultures of Europe and Eurasia in particular. A culture of peace is not possible without the joint efforts of all components of our community: national and international organizations, public and educational institutions, religious and interreligious structures, as well as leaders in all spheres of human activity.”

First lady of the Republic of Moldova, Mdm. Margareta Timofti, discussed the challenges of employment opportunities for women in the countryside, the low birth rate, lack of child care, and the breakdown of marriage and family. “It is important to preserve the values we have as a nation and at the same time adopt the European values that suit us,” she explained. “I believe that family is very important in our society. In its core essence, it is built up with joint efforts of a man and a woman.” She described projects she sponsors, including literacy, information technology, promoting the arts and national traditions, and youth volunteering as well as women’s rights and care for disabled children, orphans, nursing home residents and people with incurable diseases.

In an interview with his nation’s news agency after the conference, Dr. Rafiq Aliyev, former...
minister of religion of Azerbaijan, commented: “Relations between Europe and Eurasia are so bad and the cultural and other differences are so complicated that no one really wants to undertake a real dialogue or make an attempt for a real cooperation between the two. I was truly moved by the group assembled in Paris by UPF which genuinely wants to build dialogue and understanding.”

The program included eight panel sessions exploring aspects of the conference theme such as the role of women, cultural cooperation, character education, volunteerism, intercultural and interreligious exchange, and the family as a vehicle for building bridges between cultures. Approximately 200 people attended the sessions, including high-level representatives from Eurasia and many European nations. There was also an excellent spirit of dialogue and exploration of the ways to cooperate among the participants.

Professor Veniamin Popov, a former ambassador of Russia to various nations and now head of the Russian government’s office for inter-civilizational dialogue and social integration, expressed interest in further gatherings on the theme.

There was appreciation for European speakers who emphasized the importance of strengthening marriage and family ties, including Mr. Harry Benson of the Marriage Foundation in London and Mrs. Maria Hildingsson, secretary general of the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe.

In support of the UN International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures launched in August 2013 in Kazakhstan, the conference explored ways to develop and strengthen a culture of peace as the source of cohesion between individuals, communities, ethnicities, races and nations. It is hoped that the conference will help foster and secure peace and development for all on the foundation of shared values and good practice and generate proposals and commitments for the promotion of the rapprochement of cultures and a society of lasting peace.

The conference was co-organized by UPF and the Women’s Federation for World Peace in partnership with the Permanent Mission of Tajikistan to the European Union, the permanent delegation of the republic of Tajikistan to UNESCO, la Fundacion Cultura de Paz, L’Academie Geopolitique de Paris, ASILEC, FORIM, Cercle de Reflexion des Nations, and the Geneva Interfaith Intercultural Alliance.

This conference was the latest in a series that began in 2012, when UPF’s Ambassadors for Peace in Europe and Eurasia began to cooperate closely to raise awareness of the potential for partnership and cooperation between their two regions in place of the friction and, at times, open antagonism of the past. In April 2012 an initial joint conference entitled “Russia-Europe Dialogue: Peace and Security in Multicultural Societies at a Time of Global Crisis” was held in Moscow with the participation of high-level representatives from both regions. In October 2012, a further conference entitled “Europe and Russia: Partners in a Globalized World” was held at the UN offices in Vienna and brought together former heads of state and government from a number of nations, as well as other leading figures from the areas of politics, religion, business, academe and diplomacy to deliberate on that theme.

This conference was also part of a wider series of European Leadership Conferences on topics of pressing concern for Europe and the world, held at such venues as the UN in Geneva and in Vienna, UNESCO in Paris, national parliaments in the United Kingdom and Norway, and in the Presidential Palace in Malta, over the past few years.
Dr. Karan Singh, president of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and chancellor of Banaras Hindu University, spoke to an overflow crowd at the United Nations Information Centre in New Delhi, India on Jan. 4, 2014 encouraging everyone, and especially religious leaders, to have an “open mind and heart” towards other faith traditions.

Speaking on the occasion of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, Dr. Singh reminded the audience that throughout history “people have been tortured and massacred in the name of religion.” This, he said, was because some religions tried to monopolize God and it was precisely this exclusivist mindset that needed to change.

“Truth is one,” he continued, “but there are many paths to the divine.” Dr. Singh acknowledged multiple causes of violence, nevertheless he held firmly to the conviction that, “Without harmony among the world’s religions peace is not possible.”

The program was co-sponsored by the United Nations Information Centre for India and Bhutan and UPF. Since the international president of UPF, Dr. Thomas Walsh, was traveling to India at this time, the celebration was held in advance of the first week of February, established by a resolution of the UN General Assembly as World Interfaith Harmony Week. Dr. Singh reassured the audience of more than 150 guests that, “There is no wrong time to do the right thing.”

Prior to this Dr. Walsh spoke about a “post cold war religious resurgence.” Religion and spirituality are not outdated, and science will not solve all our problems. So people are rethinking the role that religion occupies in modern society both individually and in global geopolitics.

“Religions,” Dr. Walsh explained, “continue to play an extremely powerful role in world affairs.” He cited two examples: the current quagmire in the Middle East centering on Syria and the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Concluding his remarks, the president of UPF international noted that, “Father Moon’s call for a religious council at the UN was probably 40-50 years ahead of its time.” Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and his wife are the founders of UPF.

Shri B.P. Singh, chairman of UPF-India and the former governor of Sikkim, began the program by challenging the august audience to pull down their “mind walls.” Stereotypes and prejudices in our minds are, he asserted, one of the main causes of violence.

But how are the walls in our minds dismantled or broken down? Here Shri Singh highlighted the vital role of interreligious education that should focus on universal moral and spiritual values held common by all faiths.
A member of parliament from Nepal and the president of the Nepal Family Party, Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal, emphasized the importance of dialogue. “Without dialogue reconciliation is impossible,” he said candidly.

To underscore this, Hon. Dhakal quoted UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s statement that “Whether on the world stage or in their communities, religious and cultural leaders have a responsibility to speak the language of tolerance and respect. This is a central message of World Interfaith Harmony Week.”

The second plenary, entitled “The Effect of Interfaith Dialogue in Global Peace,” sparked a lively interaction with a number of students, especially young women from Amity University. This spirited discourse emerged spontaneously after Swami Agnivesh kindly reminded UPF-India that it must be more gender-inclusive in selecting speakers.

Following lunch, a new panelist was added to the third and concluding plenary. Ms. Apurba Pandey, a graduate student at Amity University, was asked to be on the dais. She kindly agreed.

The theme for this session was “Role of Religion in Peace Education.” This time the dialogue focused on the need for moral and family values, and religions’ roles in advocating, protecting and bequeathing these immutable principles to future generations.

In the course of the day, 19 new Ambassadors for Peace were appointed.

GLOBAL CITIZEN FORUM

Dr. Thomas G. Walsh, president of UPF, was invited to speak at the Global Citizen Forum in New Delhi, India, on Jan. 3, 2014. The forum on the theme of “One World: The Role of India, China, and the USA,” was organized by the Spice Group’s Chairman, Dr. B.K. Modi, an Indian businessman and philanthropist. Dr. Modi was appointed by the United Nations as the Coordinator for the Indian subcontinent for the Millennium World Peace Summit in 2000.

Among the 1500 attendees were the Hon. Salam Khurshid, Union Cabinet minister for external affairs of the government of India as the chief guest, along with Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati, president of the Divine Life Society in Rishikesh, India, and His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa, head of the Drukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism. Dr. Walsh was the first speaker in the inaugural session on the theme: “International Collaboration as the Force of the Future.”

The Global Citizen Forum was launched by Dr. Modi to create a platform for “one world” and inspire people to think and act beyond the limits of nationality, religion and geographical boundaries. Its representatives engage with people and governments to encourage inclusive development and international collaboration. As the Global Citizen Forum movement grows, promoting inclusive development to encourage the formation of global citizens will take the spotlight.
The Asian Clergy Leadership Conference, a project of the Universal Peace Federation, was launched in Manila, Philippines on Jan. 10, 2014. The ceremony was part of an International Interfaith Peace Conference that brought together 218 delegates from 19 nations to share ideas on the theme “Transforming Families, Rebuilding Nations, Creating a World of Peace.”

Buddhists, Hindus, Taoists, Confucianists, Muslims and Christians (Catholic and Protestant), along with government officials, members of parliament, media representatives, educators, laymen and women celebrated this historic event at UPF’s recently renovated Peace Embassy building in Quezon City in metro Manila.

They sought to find common ground in addressing common concerns that transcend racial, religious and national barriers.

Hon. Francisco S. Tatad, former senator from the Philippines and journalist, spoke on the fruit of peace. “Peace” he said, was “not only the absence of war but above all the tranquillitas ordinis, the tranquility of order.”

Senator Tatad praised UPF for its visionary leadership because it has not forgotten “the smallest yet most important player in our search for peace.” He was referring to the focus on “the natural human family, which remains the basic unit of society... the least common denominator of all human civilizations.”

Highlighting the theme of the peace conference, the Filipino senator reiterated that, “only by transforming the family can we hope to rebuild the nation, and only by rebuilding nations can we create a real world of peace.”

In his congratulatory remarks, Dr. Chang Shik Yang, chairman of UPF International, talked about UPF Founder Father Sun Myung Moon’s concern that a global nightmare might unfold if the conflicts in the Middle East expanded into an all-out religious war. For this reason the Middle East Peace Initiative was launched. Dr. Yang explained that since its beginning in 2003, thousands of people from all over the world have participated in these interfaith pilgrimages of peace that sought to build harmony among people of the Abrahamic faiths.

Interfaith Networks Grow in the Philippines

By Dr. Robert S. Kittel, Director of Education, UPF-Asia
The UPF International chairman concluded his remarks by saying, “For true unity and lasting peace among the world’s great religions, we need to go beyond mere tolerance and acceptance of our differences; we need to find common ground for meaningful interaction and cooperation.”

**FILIPINOS CELEBRATE MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**

Transformational.” This was how Archbishop George A. Stallings, president of the American Clergy Leadership Conference, described his recent experiences in the Philippines.

And this was even before the main event: the Interfaith Peace Family Blessing Festival in the afternoon of the last day of an international and interreligious conference, Jan. 11, 2014, at the Ynares Center in Antipolo City in the province of Rizal, a suburb east of Manila.

In that festival, 14,000 Filipinos gathered to celebrate marriage: both purity before and fidelity in marriage. Young people recited the “Pure Love Pledge,” in which they promised to remain abstinent until marriage. The couples who were already married renewed their vows while newlyweds promised to be faithful to each other and to raise their children according to these universal standards.

There were 10,000 people inside the Ynares Center and another 4,000 people in the overflow area set up outside. They witnessed religious leaders from 20 faith traditions standing together to honor marriage, which is universal for all the world’s religions.

The Philippines movement has conducted nine such large-scale marriage-centered festivals over the last 22 months for more than 100,000 participants. The largest was in January 2013 at the Araneta Coliseum in Manila, in which 13,000 couples participated. This program a year later was a follow-up to that event, since many people who attended wanted other family members to have a chance to also rededicate their marriages.

To start the main event, 21 religious leaders from 20 faiths participated in the “Water of Harmony” ceremony, in which they poured water in a common vessel as a mark of harmony and oneness of heart. Then they jointly offered prayers. Dr. and Mrs. Chung Sik Yong, chair of UPF-Asia, officiated.

After the marriage rededication, Archbishop Stallings shook the rafters with his impassioned speech. The Filipino audience responded in kind. “You are the agents of [social] change, and God has been waiting for you,” he said. Then he repeatedly asked them, “Can you do it?” With each response the audience grew louder and louder, “Yes we can; yes we will. Yes we can; yes we will. Yes we can; yes we will!” they shouted. It was electrifying.

He concluded his address with a saying from Ghana: “The ruin of a nation begins in the homes of its people.” He added, “And the restoration of a nation begins in the homes of its people too.” He then ran across the stage and out into the audience, and once again the Filipinos erupted in cheers.

Earlier in the program, Dr. Chang Shik Yang, chairman of UPF International, explained that “the family is more than the cornerstone of society; it is the very core of God’s purpose of creation.” The family is the only institution that God created, he reiterated.

The mayor of Antipolo, Hon. Casimiro “Jun” Ynares III, opened the main event welcoming the packed house. He used the analogy of a passenger train saying that we all have a common vision and mission which unites us on “our shared pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God.”

Special guest and five-time Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines, Hon. Jose C. de Venecia, Jr., expressed his sympathy for the more than 8,000 Filipinos who died and four million who were displaced due to typhoon Haiyan.

He also publicly acknowledged the contributions made by UPF, the sponsor of the event. Spontaneously, he then invited his friend Hon. Mushahid Hussain Sayed, a senator from Pakistan, to the stage to greet his “Filipino family.” Senator Sayed referred to Father Moon as a global bridge-builder who was building bridges between people from various countries, religions and civilizations.

The end of the family festival was a special candlelight memorial for the victims of typhoon Haiyan. Winds measuring 315 km/h (195 mph) made Haiyan the most powerful storm ever recorded to strike land.

In hushed silence, an honor guard led six families of victims to the stage for a floral offering to the departed and those who are still rebuilding their lives.

Many shed tears again.

“A common vision and mission unites us on our shared pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God.”

- Hon. Casimiro “Jun” Ynares III, mayor of Antipolo
In 2013, UPF-North America organized leadership conferences on the theme of "Building a Nation and a World of Peace" in five cities to build national networks of Ambassadors for Peace. The international events attracted participants from 16 Caribbean nations, Canada and Mexico:

- Washington, DC – September 26-27
- Ottawa, Canada – October 3-4
- Miami, Florida – November 1-2
- Los Angeles, California – November 15-16
- Chicago, Illinois – December 13-14

Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, chairman of UPF-North America, and Dr. Thomas Walsh, president of UPF-International, were executive organizers. Mrs. Tomiko Duggan as acting secretary general of UPF-North America reached out to include a broad range of interfaith, academic, political and civil society leaders.

Dr. Kim expressed delight that the Caribbean nations were well represented in Miami and that people from Mexico attended the program in Los Angeles. He shared with participants his passion for peace and UPF’s vision of bringing people of different religions, cultures and nationalities together in order to create lasting peace.

Dr. Walsh spoke about the need for both internal and external components to world peace. Noting that mainly national interests are served at the UN, he referred to UPF Founder Rev. Sun Myung Moon’s vision of an interreligious council connected to the UN, an idea that is being discussed in many circles. Dialogue and cross-cultural understanding are essential, he said, adding that “UPF is becoming a respected partner with not only religious leaders but also political leaders and social scientists.”

The following people were instrumental in the success of the conferences: Dr. Michael Balcomb, president of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification-USA, who gave presentations on marriage and family; Mrs. Susan Fefferman, Washington DC staff of UPF-USA; Rev. Tom Cutts, executive director of the American Clergy Leadership Conference; Mr. Naokimi Ushiroda, president of the
Representatives from UPF in several Caribbean nations attended the leadership conference in Miami, where they had an opportunity to consult with each other and regional leaders. Canada and the Caribbean islands are now part of the North American region of UPF, along with the USA.

Recent UPF programs in the Dominican Republic included a conference in the National Congress, reported Leonidas Belliard; character education trainings in St. Lucia and programs such as the Religious Youth Service are building bonds between local and international youth, reported Remy Taupier. Both of them organized events commemorating UN days such as the International Day of Peace.

“Violence, especially among young people, is a significant problem in Jamaica,” according to Rev. Dennis Salmon, who has organized celebrations of the UN International Day of Families to build family cohesion. He would welcome visits by religious leaders from the USA to help promote interfaith cooperation. Religious Youth Service has been active in schools in Jamaica.

In Barbados, Rev. Peter Phillips said that, “encouraging young people to keep their purity and to honor their culture are key challenges facing all churches in the country. It would be very helpful if we could build momentum by partnering with other nations to expand youth activities.” He organized a commemoration of the new UN Global Day of Parents in 2013.

Rev. Dawn Bacchus-Horan, who with her sister Kay represents St. Vincent and the Grenadines, described her work spreading the vision of UPF and its founders through national radio and television.

“We can learn some things by reading reports,” Dr. Ki Hoon Kim commented during a fellowship dinner at a Cuban restaurant, “but the real contact comes when we see each other’s faces, hear each other’s voices, pray together, share a meal together and come up with common goals.”
WASHINGTON DC

Peace and Security Forums

By Dr. William Selig, Deputy Director, UPF's Washington DC Office of Peace and Security Affairs

Since 2011, the Washington DC Office of Peace and Security Affairs, directed by Dr. Antonio Betancourt, has held monthly meetings on volatile areas of tension and conflict. UPF emphasizes the pursuit of internal “soft power” solutions and “track two” diplomacy, which is essential to peacebuilding and in line with the philosophy of UPF’s founders. The following is an overview of forums during 2013.

TRANSTATIONAL CRIME AND GANGL VIOLENCE

DEC. 11, 2013
Moderator: Ms. Cynthia Turner, Executive Director, SeraphinGLOBAL

Policymakers are coming to recognize the need for a paradigm shift to look at the root causes and to build an integrative and comprehensive two-pronged approach: “Hard power” utilizing the police and military; and “soft power,” emphasizing solutions centered on universal spiritual and moral values. It is the responsibility of governments in concert with the UN to create that paradigm shift – one that brings new “playing field rules.” Global problems demand global solutions and global allocation of resources, human and otherwise.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND POVERTY: A CRITICAL CONNECTION

NOV. 6, 2013
Moderator: Mrs. Angelika Selle, President, Women’s Federation for World Peace-USA

As new research arises in the anti-human trafficking movement, we have come to realize that by putting the majority of our efforts into affecting the demand (at the grassroots level), we will have a greater opportunity to actually make substantial reductions in modern-day slavery. And, as a strategic plan, we must include addressing the head of this issue – the trafficker’s mind-set – the distribution and commercialization of bodies, at a root cause level – hence a cultural shift is a must.

PEACE ZONES AS AVENUES FOR STABILITY IN SOUTH SUDAN, SYRIA, COLOMBIA, AND KOREA

OCT. 15, 2013
Moderator: Ms. Velma Anne Ruth, President, Independent Review and Executive Director, Middle East Democracy Federation

The UN introduced the concept of “peace zones” in 1947 to promote peace in Jerusalem. Since then, the UN has engaged dozens of peacekeeping missions through the development of international coalitions for stability, addressing crises of military proportions, humanitarian, volatile conflicts and major natural disasters. The UPF forum reviewed four case studies and the viability of establishing zones of peace as a means to resolve conflicts in Korea, South Sudan, Colombia, and Kurdistan. In addition, the participants discussed a refinement of the concept of “peace zones,” as proposed by the UPF founder.

PEACE, STABILITY, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN MICRONESIA

SEP. 18, 2013
Co-Moderators: Dr. Satu P. Limaye, Director, East-West Center in Washington, DC and Dr. Mark Borthwick, Director, US Asia Pacific Council, Washington, DC

As the US involvement in the Middle East winds down and China continues to rise as a global superpower, the strategic and geopolitical value of Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia will increase dramatically in the coming decade. The nations must establish their identity as individual countries, and at the same time, unite together and speak as a single voice on the international stage. Issues addressed included: (1) the impact of climate change, (2) economic development in the region, and (3) the role of the external powers in working with the region on these critical challenges.
**TRANSNATIONAL CRIME IN THE AMERICAS**
**JUN. 27, 2013**
*Moderator: Prof. Ruth Wedgwood, Director, International Law and Organizations Program, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University*

Experts in the field gathered to discuss transnational organized crime and its many faces—drug and human trafficking, money laundering, corruption, the link between transnational crime and terrorism, and the serious threat posed to national and international security. Participants discussed the cultural, political, technological and financial aspects. The rule of law and enforcement are needed, but fundamentally the root causes must be more effectively addressed by governments, the UN and other international institutions, especially governments of the industrialized world.

**TWO STATES, ONE COUNTRY: ISRAEL-PALESTINE: A PATH TOWARD A SHARED FUTURE**
**MAY 22, 2013**
*Co-moderators: Mr. Kamal Nawash, Esq., President, Free Muslims Coalition and Dr. Andrew Wilson, Professor of Scriptural Studies, Unification Theological Seminary*

More than 20 years since the historic handshake between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin that sealed the Oslo accords and outlined the path to a two-state solution, Israelis and Palestinians are no closer to reaching a permanent solution to their conflict, and many experts now believe that the two-state solution is no longer practical or feasible. Over the last five years, an increasing number of prominent Israelis and Palestinians have openly called for or begun considering the practicality of a shared future in the form of a federation, confederation or a one-state solution between Israel and Palestine.

**SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE EAST AND SOUTH CHINA SEAS: PREVENTING TERRITORIAL DISPUTES FROM SPINNING OUT OF CONTROL**
**APR. 12, 2013**
* Moderator: Dr. Alexandre Mansourov, Visiting Scholar, US-Korea Institute at the School of Advanced International Studies, the Johns Hopkins University*

Territorial disputes have increased political and military tensions in the East and South China Seas especially in relation to small island territories claimed by nearby nations. The islands are close to key shipping lanes, fishing grounds and oil reserves. Participants in the forum discussed approaches to reduce the tensions in the East and South China Seas.

**FAITH, RELIGION, AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY**
**MAR. 13, 2013**
*Moderator: Dr. Douglas Johnston, President, International Center for Religion & Diplomacy*

A striking development of the last 20 years of international affairs is the rise of faith or religion as a prominent driver, key influence and policy-shaper of nations, states and regions affecting the lives, the economy and the security of common citizens around the world. The issue can be summarized as follows: How can we use religion in a positive way not only to understand what is going on, and not cede the ground to the extremists, but actually occupy the higher moral ground ourselves?

**BRINGING LONG-TERM PEACE AND SECURITY TO THE BALKAN REGION**
**JAN. 30, 2013**
*Moderator: Mr. Ralph Winnie, Jr., Director, Global Business Development, Eurasia Center*

The ambassadors of Albania, Croatia and Montenegro agreed: (1) Hope still emanates for long-term peace and prosperity in the Balkan Peninsula (Southeast Europe), (2) there are shared goals for integration into Euro-Atlantic Structures (NATO) and the European Union, and (3) the US and the European Union are strategic partners. The current financial crisis has brought concerns about jobs, health care, education, pensions, poverty, the impact on free election, and questions on how to deal with organized crime and corruption that is so pervasive in the region.
In the final years of his life, UPF founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon initiated a project in Las Vegas aimed at offering a new vision for peace and human development to world leaders. He sometimes called it his “Shining City” project because he hoped it would help change the reputation of Las Vegas from “Sin City” to a city of educational enlightenment. He proposed the realization of a major educational institution for world leaders where they could take inspiration from UPF’s worldview along with both the natural wonders of this area such as the Grand Canyon and from the monumental achievements of human ingenuity such as Hoover Dam and the creativity of Las Vegas itself.

Dr. Moon saw this as an ideal environment to bring leaders of the developing world together for a chance to study UPF’s world vision and at the same time to mix and mingle with people who have the heart to share the prosperity and technology of America with those who have the greatest needs.

Following this vision and also as follow-up to the first World Summit of UPF International held in Seoul, South Korea, in February 2013, UPF-Africa worked together with the son of the UPF founder, Mr. Kwon Jin Moon, and with the staff of the International Office for Education and Development set up by UPF International in Las Vegas to host three major events in 2013 involving two first ladies and other dignitaries and leaders from African countries, including some who had participated in the World Summit.

On Jun. 15, 2013, UPF hosted a delegation led by the first lady of the West African Republic of Mali, Mrs. Mintou Doucouré Traoré. Mrs. Traoré was received by the mayor of Las Vegas, Mrs. Carolyn Goodman, as well as many other local dignitaries and business leaders. She listened to UPF’s educational presentations on the legacy of peace left by Dr. Moon as a possible solution to the ethnic and religious conflicts in her country. She was awed by the Grand Canyon and other inspirational sites. And through contacts of UPF, she received a donation of nearly two million dollars worth of educational materials for her own humanitarian organization in Mali.

From Oct. 28 to Nov. 2, the same UPF organizers helped the UPF-Nigeria chapter bring a group of 13 Nigerian dignitaries and Ambassadors for Peace to Las Vegas. These religious, political, business and educational leaders came to the “Shining City,” completely self-financed, to study UPF’s principles of peace and to meet academic leaders at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. UPF President Dr. Thomas Walsh spoke to them at the start of their six-day program about the history and background of UPF worldwide. Mr. Kwon Jin Moon also spoke to the participants about concepts related to peace and conflict resolution. UPF International’s education director Dr. Tony Guerra as well as staff from UPF-Africa gave presentations and led lively discussions on UPF’s principles of peace. The seminar ended with a special event at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Student Union Theater that included a bridge of peace ceremony, a panel discussion about
overcoming adversity through service to others, and an award ceremony in which nine Nigerian and American dignitaries were appointed UPF Ambassadors for Peace in recognition of their outstanding community service.

Only a month later, from Nov. 27 to Dec. 2, the UPF-Africa team received another distinguished first lady from West Africa. Mrs. Isolina Da Fonseca Nhamajo, the wife of the president of Guinea Bissau, came to Las Vegas with a delegation that included the former ambassador of Guinea Bissau to the United States who is now a presidential advisor and the head of the first lady’s own charitable organization called Fundacao Firkidja, which in Portuguese and Creole simply translates a “Support Foundation,” helping handicapped women and youth.

Dr. Walsh flew in to Las Vegas to greet the first lady and offer her delegation a presentation about UPF’s work worldwide. As with the other delegations, Mrs. Nhamajo heard presentations about UPF’s vision for world peace and development through education, offered by Mr. Moon and Dr. Guerra.

Mrs. Nhamajo also attended a special fundraising dinner in her honor to support the work of Fundacao Firkidja. At the dinner she was honored with special citations from the office of Nevada senator Harry Reid and from the Las Vegas City Council. She, in turn, offered hand-woven traditional cloths to Mr. and Mrs. Moon, Dr. Walsh, Mrs. Katherine Harting R igney, the chair of UPF-Africa, and the founder of Re-Purpose America, whose Las Vegas-based company is offering several containers of recyclable materials to the first lady’s project in Guinea Bissau.

Re-Purpose America is an outstanding example of ingenuity and resourcefulness: every month hundreds of companies buy hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of vinyl signage to advertise before and during conventions that rarely last more than a week. At the end, all this material is discarded. Re-Purpose is paid by these companies to remove the material, but instead of destroying it, they have developed ways of recycling the material into items such as school bags for children and tents for emergency relief organizations. They have even built an entire warehouse out of recycled materials for their own use.

Now, Re-Purpose wants to offer materials to the First Lady of Guinea Bissau and train people in her organization how to use the materials to produce valuable commodities, thus teaching job skills and creating an industry that can help people in Africa. Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, co-founder of UPF, has offered to pay for shipping the first container of materials to Guinea Bissau. Other donors are joining in.

Through personal meetings with people like the founder of Re-Purpose America, the first lady was able to forge relationships that can have a significant impact on her country of 1.5 million people. And in the process, Las Vegas is truly able to contribute to relieving the suffering of countless underprivileged people a world away in Africa – providing a beacon of hope that makes Las Vegas the “Shining City” that UPF’s founder had dreamed of and worked for.
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