

Universal Peace Federation Spain Hosts a Tribute to All Victims in Israel and Gaza

Armando Lozano
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We are at a time when the world is witnessing much suffering, pain, hardship and extreme conditions in Gaza and Israel. One cannot be immune to what is happening. To this effect, the Spanish branch of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) held a conference on 14 December, 2023, in tribute to all the victims in this war, be they Arabs or Israelis.



It was an immense challenge to all those concerned to bring together Arabs and Jews in one room, at a time when both countries are at war with each other.

One would have thought that years of experience of some members working with the Palestinian Embassy and having Palestinian and Arab friends, mostly writers, university professors, artists and

musicians would have eased the way. But it was not to be so. Arabs refused to be in the same room with Jews, who were more open to the idea. After many pleadings both sides accepted. As organisers we felt however, that certain conditions had to be set, namely no verbal attacks on the state of Israel, no mention of terrorist Zionism and no comments which would be deemed hurtful by either side.



For many years members of the Jewish community in our area, as well as other friends from different walks of life have been guests at our UPF Cultural Center. This helped choose representatives from each group, on the understanding that there would be no talk about politics.

The main speaker of the program was Father Angel Garcia Rodriguez, founder of "Messengers of Peace", a person known to all Spaniards for his charitable work in disaster and war zones, a recipient of the highest of national honours. Father Angel Garcia Rodriguez was the key peace mediator.



Also taking part was Yael Cobano, the director of the Reformed Jewish Synagogue of Madrid. She and her community have worked very closely with UPF in the past. Yael Cobano comes from a Moroccan Sephardi family and speaks Arabic. She is very sensitive to the struggles Arabs and Jews are experiencing

and can empathise with both parties.

Another speaker was Wafir S. Gibril, a very devout Muslim from Sudan and a great musician, quite known in the country. Wafir S. Gibril has been our friend for years and was very enthusiastic about the event. He helped with the musical accompaniment to Eliyah Hera, a singer from Israel. Seeing musicians from Sudan, Iran and Spain accompanying a Jewish singer had a deep impact on all those present.



Our "Tribute to All Victims" had four themes - Music, Poetry, Messages and Prayers. The musical programme included Christian hymns and Sufi, Arab and Jewish music. It was thoroughly enjoyed by the whole audience; people coming from different religions, different communities and various backgrounds.

Next to speak was Dr Mohamed Osman, a university Professor of Medicine and reputed poet. He read a text written by a medical colleague of his who had died. He gave a very emotional rendition which brought tears to many in the audience. Following came recitations of poems presented by a Christian poet and by a military veteran who too, is a poet. Continuing on the same theme, Dr Osman asked Mr Armando Lozano if he would read a poem he had translated. The poem was written by Ms Hiba Abu Nada, a young woman who had died tragically. This reading had a very moving effect on everyone there.

The next theme was of Peace Messages. The first message was given by Mohamed Samadi, a Moroccan professional working with refugees. He was followed by Rabbi Mario Stofenmacher. Finishing on this theme, Father Angel Garcia Rodriguez gave the last peace message in which he aptly emphasised that "the problems in this world are the results of not loving one another enough. We have to love more."

Then came the last theme, that of Prayer. Wafir S. Gibril recited some paragraphs from the Holy Koran. That day being the last day of the of Hanukkah, the Jewish celebration of lights, three representatives of the community lit candles and offered prayers. To close the event there was a moment of meditation and reflection for all, with gentle music playing in the background.

