



UPF EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST NEWSLETTER



INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM SUMMIT 2023: “RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE, ALL THE TIME”

Written by Mark Brann, vice president, UPF EUME, and Peter Zoehrer, coordinator, IMAP EUME

The International Religious Freedom (IRF) or Belief Alliance, consisting of approximately 40 nations committed to upholding religious freedom, convened the IRF Summit from 31 January to 1 February 2023, with Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, former chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, and Ambassador Sam Brownback, a former U.S. ambassador-at-large for IRF, as its co-chairs.

The summit partners included several non-profit organizations, such as Global Christian Relief, Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice, Alliance Defending Freedom International and others. Meta Platforms, the owner of Facebook, was the corporate sponsor, and UPF and

The Washington Times Foundation secured the role of “Title Partners.”

This year’s conference focused on presenting and discussing four distinct tracks: defending, documenting, developing, and denying. The defending track focused on the legal, justice, and accountability aspects of freedom of religion or belief; the documenting track highlighted the importance of journalism and gathering evidence; the developing track examined and developed advocacy efforts and highlighted country-level achievements; lastly, the denying track highlighted victims who have been persecuted on the basis of their religion or belief.

The Summit was held in Washington,

D.C., and attracted many senior U.S. politicians, such as former Speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich, high-level State Department officials, religious freedom rapporteurs from alliance member nations such as the United Kingdom, and many of the world’s top religious freedom experts, such as Dr. Ján Figel’ from Slovakia, a former European commissioner for education and European Commission special envoy for the promotion of religious freedom or belief outside the EU (2016-2019).

This was the appropriate forum in which to focus attention on the situation in Japan, where the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU, former



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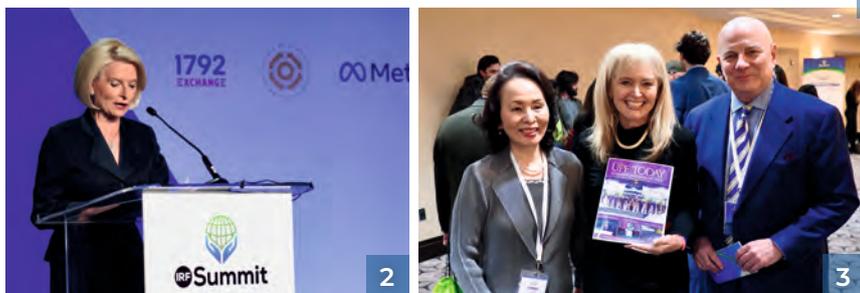
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Unification Church) is being strongly persecuted on the false basis that it was somehow responsible for the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 8, 2022. One whole "dinner session," with the attendance of around 350 guests, focused on the religious freedom violations against Japan's FFWPU, which were roundly condemned by former Speaker Newt Gingrich, among others. At the end of the session, the great majority of the distinguished audience signed UPF's Declaration in Support of Fundamental Human Rights and Human Dignity.

In her concluding remarks, H.E. Beth Van Schaack, ambassador-at-large for global criminal justice, gave a realistic view of the challenges ahead by mentioning just a few areas in which her office is working: Afghanistan, where the Taliban continue to persecute members of religious minority groups; Myanmar, where more than 1.2 million people have fled the horrific violence in the country; the Central African Republic, where conflict is driven primarily by competition over political power and control of resources, but violence at times has targeted communities based on actual or perceived religious affiliation; and in China, where members of religious communities have long experienced repression, but have seen a dramatic increase in abuses under the current regime.

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Dr. Katsumi Otsuka
Chairman, UPF Europe & Middle East



Dear Readers,

The year 2023 began under the banner of freedom of religion, with the International Religious Freedom Summit 2023 that was held in the United States, organized by a 40-nation alliance in partnership with UPF.

Early in 2022 a tragic conflict began in Ukraine, with dire worldwide economic, political, social, and security consequences. One trend underpinning the conflict has been a heightening threat to religious freedom around the world.

This newsletter features a series of events held by UPF at significant locations in our region – the United Nations in Geneva and Vienna, the World Council of Churches, etc. – to address this growing threat to religious freedom, which is the most fundamental of human rights.

As we prepare to celebrate this year the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we will continue to mobilize leaders to seek peaceful solutions to conflicts in the Europe and Middle East region. Thank you for your support for UPF activities.

1 Left to right: Hon. Dan Burton, member of the U.S. Congress (1983-2013); Dr. Samia Tawil Burton, professor of medicine, George Washington University; Ambassador Suzan Johnson Cook, ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, U.S. State Department (2011-2013); Dr. Michael Jenkins, president, UPF International; Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, president, Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice, IRF Summit co-chair; Ambassador Sam Brownback, US ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom (2018-2021), IRF Summit co-chair; Hon. Dr. Ján Figel, former European Commission special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union; Dr. Thomas Walsh, chairman, UPF International; Ambassador Callista Gingrich, U.S. ambassador to the Holy See (2017-2021); Hon. Newt Gingrich, U.S. House speaker (1995-1999).

2 Ambassador Callista Gingrich, U.S. ambassador to the Holy See (2017-2021), speaking at the Summit.

3 Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, president, Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice, IRF Summit co-chair (center), with Tomiko Duggan, UPF director of public affairs, and Thomas McDevitt, chairman, The Washington Times

BITTER WINTER, A RESOURCE FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Bitter Winter (www.bitterwinter.org) was started in 2018 as a daily magazine about religious liberty in China. Since 2020, it includes a section on countries other than China. It now has more than 100,000 monthly readers and for three years in a row has been the most quoted source in the section on China of the US Department of State's yearly report on religious liberty.

The editor-in-chief of *Bitter Winter* is Italian sociologist of religions Dr. Massimo Introvigne, a well-known scholar of new religious movements. Its director-in-charge is Italian journalist Marco Respinti.



WORLD NEWS

SPEECH EXCERPTS FROM THE CONFERENCES OF HOPE

Amb. Suzan Johnson Cook

Former U.S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom



Freedom of religion is an essential foundation of democracy, alongside the freedoms of speech and assembly. We must uphold religious freedom in these countries where they dismiss, denounce, and deny people the right to choose their faith. When we are free to choose who we are, and what we choose to believe, then this world will truly be a better place.

Mr. Humphrey Hawksley

Author, broadcaster, former BBC foreign correspondent



As a journalist, I have an eye for following the trajectory of a story, and this one is very strange. A charismatic former prime minister charting a future course for Japan is murdered by a disgruntled man with a homemade gun. The debate, though, does not focus on, say, "mental health challenges in Japanese society." A more balanced story needs to be told.

Dr. Massimo Introvigne

Co-founder, Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR)



Communism, Nazism, and secular humanism are different ideologies, but all try to eradicate religions. All three are still alive and kicking, with communism dominating the most populous country of the world, China, and secular humanism controlling many newsrooms, universities, and publishing houses in the West. The ultimate goal of all three ideologies is to destroy all religions. However, religions are extraordinarily resistant to persecution.

Prof. Cole Durham

Director, International Center for Law and Religion Studies, Brigham Young University's J. Reuben Clark Law School



The history of my own church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is an interesting case study. It underwent some of the most acute persecution of any group in American history in its early days. Yet now, it is the 4th or 5th largest denomination in the USA, and its members are widely accepted and rarely persecuted.

Amb. Sam Brownback

Former U.S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom



Religious freedom is a hallmark of an open society in a democracy. This was in the 1948 UN Charter of Human Rights that virtually every country around the world signed on to. It really is the cornerstone to democracy and a cornerstone to the other human rights. With religious freedom you can build the other human rights.

Dr. Michael Pillsbury

Senior Fellow, the Hudson Institute



In my book *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, which was a best seller in the U.S., Japan, and Korea, as well as throughout the world, I revealed from internal Chinese documents their plan to replace the United States as the global superpower. To maintain the Communist Party at home, Xi Jinping has increasingly turned to religious persecution. This should concern us all.

Hon. Dr. Ján Figel'

European Commission special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion and belief outside the EU (2016-2019)



The modern understanding of justice is based on the respect of fundamental human rights. Religious freedom is defined as freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is at the center of the long list of rights. Freedom of religion or belief is a litmus test of all other human rights! Because when religious freedom is missing, then other civil freedoms are missing as well.

Pastor Paula White-Cain

Former special advisor to the Faith and Opportunity Initiative of the White House



It is my heartfelt and deep conviction that every human being should have the most basic right of religious liberty. One fundamental principle and truth is that our rights do not come from government. They come from God. It is this deep conviction of standing for freedom of religion that has driven my life work of 38 years in ministry.

WORLD NEWS

CONFERENCES OF HOPE FOCUS ON THREATS TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Written by UPF International

Respect for universal human rights and religious freedom was the subject of two Conferences of Hope co-hosted by UPF's Think Tank 2022 and The Washington Times Foundation on November 12 and December 17, 2022, in South Korea and livestreamed to millions of viewers globally.

Speakers in the first conference, which pointed to persecution of religious groups including Muslim Uyghurs, Tibetan Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Ahmadis, Bahá'ís, Jehovah's Witnesses, Yazidis, Falun Gong, and more recently in Japan, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, formerly the Unification Church.

The second Conference of Hope, which focused on the themes "Freedom of Religion and Thought as a Universal Right" and "Freedom of Thought and the Threat of Communism," was held on December 17. Hon. Dan Burton, a US congressman (1983-2013) and co-chair of UPF's International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP), acted as a co-host.

Congratulatory messages were given by H.E. Goodluck Jonathan, president of Nigeria (2010-2015), Ambassador Suzan Johnson Cook, an ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom at the US State Department (2011-2013), Professor W. Cole Durham Jr., who directs the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at Brigham Young University's J. Reuben Clark Law School, and about 30 overseas national parliamentarians, members of IAPP.

The program concluded with a call for people worldwide to sign a Declaration in Support of Fundamental Human Rights and Human Dignity: Overcoming Threats to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion. "We call upon all people throughout the world to affirm this declaration and to uphold the universal freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and to stand firmly against all forms of intolerance, prejudice, slander, and hate toward others," the declaration states.



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1 Hon. Dan Burton, US congressman (1983-2013); Co-chair, International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP)

2 Greyce Elias, member of Chamber of Deputies, Brazil

3 H.E. Goodluck Jonathan, president of Nigeria (2010-2015)

4 Filomena Gonçalves, minister of health, Cape Verde



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5 Hon. Newt Gingrich, speaker of the US House of Representatives (1995-1999)

6 Cardinal Kelvin Felix, archbishop emeritus, Castries, Saint Lucia

7 Emilia Alfaro de Franco, senator and first lady, Paraguay (2012-2013)



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8 Thae Yong-ho, Korean National Assemblyman; Former North Korean diplomat who defected to the South

9 Dr. Massimo Introvigne, founder and managing director, Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), gives a speech at the Conference of Hope.

10 Entertainment by a Korean traditional drum youth group.

REGIONAL NEWS

EXPERTS DECRY JAPAN'S HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

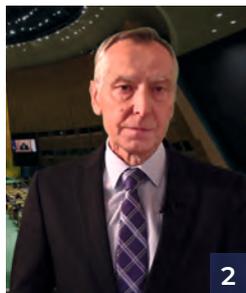
From a report by Heiner Handschin and Chantal Chételat Komagata, UPF Europe and the Middle East

Geneva, Switzerland – The human rights defense organization Coordination of Associations and Individuals for Freedom of Conscience (CAP LC), in co-sponsorship with UPF and its affiliated organization Women's Federation for World Peace, held a side event at the United Nations Offices titled “What the Abe Assassination Reveals about Tolerance of Hate Speech and the Deficit of Religious Freedom in Japan.”

The side event took place on January 31, 2023, on the occasion of the Universal Periodic Review of Japan at the Human Rights Council. CAP LC Director Christine Mirre chaired the meeting. About 20 people were present, including a representative of the diplomatic mission of Japan to the UN Geneva, while 120 people attended online, including representatives from 15 UN missions of member states.

In a recorded video, Hon. Dr. Ján Figel', the first European Commission special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU, described the process that led to two legal initiatives by the Japanese government, one of which is aimed at depriving the Unification Church of its status as a religious corporation following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 8, 2022.

Dr. Aaron Rhodes, president of the Forum for Religious Freedom (FOREF) Europe, explained that the abduction crimes committed in the past against the UC in Japan had not been taken seriously by the Japanese authorities, and that they were being followed today by “new massive assaults” on UC members after the assassination of Shinzo Abe. Dr. Rhodes appealed to



1 Left to right: Jacques Marion, Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, Willy Fautré, Dr. Aaron Rhodes, and CAP LC President Thierry Valle in front of the Palace of Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

2 Hon. Dr. Ján Figel' delivers a recorded message.

3 Dr. Katsumi Otsuka (left) joined the panelists to give concluding remarks.

Japanese leaders to take positive steps against intolerance toward minorities.

Video excerpts were then shown, in which Dr. Massimo Introvigne, founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), described how the victims and perpetrators were intentionally switched by greedy lawyers who already had been involved in the sequestrations of thousands of UC members, and by communists who never forgave the UC for being against their ideology.

Willy Fautré, CEO and director of Human Rights without Frontiers, affirmed that deconversion through confinement is contrary to Article

18.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) – signed by Japan – which guarantees the right to retain one's religious beliefs. He deplored the more than 400 violent incidents against churches and individuals of the UC in the two months following the tragic killing of Shinzo Abe.

In conclusion, Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, the UPF co-chair for Europe and the Middle East, spoke about a City Council member in Japan who studied the case and concluded that “it was not the former Unification Church that violated the Constitution, but the way the Unification Church was criticized that was violating the Constitution.”

REGIONAL NEWS

SYMPOSIUM DISCUSSES THREATS TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Written by Barbara Grabner, journalist and historian

An international symposium on “Religious Freedom: The Human Right under Attack” in Bratislava, Slovakia, brought together human rights advocates from throughout Europe on December 9, 2022, the eve of Human Rights Day. It was organized by UPF in cooperation with the Tunega, Púčik, and Tesár Foundation; the Italian Federation for Human Rights (FIDU); Forum for Religious Freedom (FOREF) Europe; and Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP), and it was co-hosted by the International Center for Law and Religion Studies (ICLRS) of Brigham Young University. The event drew an international audience of approximately 100, including Mgr. Nicola Girasoli, the apostolic nuncio to Slovakia, and H.E. Nigel Baker, the British ambassador to Slovakia, as well as numerous online participants.

The first session, “The Promotion of Human Dignity—Recommitment to Human Rights,” was organized by ICLRS and moderated by Dr. Ewelina U. Ochab, a lawyer with the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute. Dr. Ján Figel, president of NTPT, explained that “Human dignity and human rights are closely knitted together. For a non-believer, religious freedom is of little interest, but dignity is acceptable to everyone and could serve as a bridge.” Professor Mark Hill, vice president of the International Consortium for Law and Religion Studies, agreed with the importance of human dignity, because believers may be

offended by the right to free speech when others criticize their faith.

The second session on “Religious Freedom as a Human Right Endangered in Europe?” featured Professor Brett G. Scharffs, director of Brigham Young University’s ICLRS, who agreed that human dignity must be enforced, but it should not replace human rights. Other speakers were Hulda Fahmi, the international director of Set My People Free, Dr. Afsar Rathor, a former project manager in UNIDO and other UN organizations, and Dr. Roman Joch, director of the Slovakia-based Research Institute for Labour and Family.

The final session, which was organized by FOREF, focused on “The Role of the Media in the Promotion and Protection of Religious Freedom and Human Rights.” Speakers included Dr. Antonio Stango, president of the Italian Federation for Human Rights, Peter Zoehrer, executive director of FOREF, and Dr. Aaron Rhodes, president of FOREF, who lamented that freedom of expression is endangered, because European Union members are pressured to implement laws to prohibit hate speech, which could be misused for political reasons. Jacques Marion, the UPF co-chair for Europe and the Middle East, offered the concluding remarks.

1 Session 1 panelists (left to right):

Dr. Ewelina U. Ochab, Dr. Ján Figel, and Professor Mark Hill

2 Session 3 panelists (left to right) Chantal Chételat Komagata, Dr. Antonio Stango, Peter Zoehrer, and Dr. Aaron Rhodes

3 Professor Brett G. Scharffs, director of Brigham Young University’s International Center for Law and Religion Studies



REVEREND MOON'S STRUGGLE FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

In 1981, Rev. Sun Myung Moon was indicted for supposedly evading taxes on less than \$8,000. No one in the United States had ever been indicted for evading taxes on such a small amount. The Supreme Court refused to hear the case, despite forty amicus briefs in support of Rev. Moon from mainline Christian leaders, legal associations, civil liberty groups and state governments.

In the meantime, protests were held around the nation over the injustice Reverend Moon was suffering because of religious persecution. Many Christian leaders began to realize that the government was making a serious assault on religious freedom. Christians, including the National

Council of Churches headed by Rev. Dean M. Kelley, and non-religious groups representing more than 160 million Americans came to his legal defense.

In 1982, Reverend Moon was sentenced to 18 months in jail and on July 20, 1984, entered the federal prison of Danbury. Upon his release on August 20, 1985, after completing thirteen months of incarceration, major Christian and civil rights leaders, including Rev. Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority and Rev. Joseph Lowery of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, held a press conference both to decry the persecution and imprisonment of Reverend Moon and to welcome him back.

Excerpt of the Testimony of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon at the US Senate Hearing on Religious Freedom on June 26, 1984, in Washington, D.C., USA

Without religious freedom God cannot fulfill His ideal. The Pilgrim Fathers understood that if you do not have religious freedom, you have no freedom at all. They risked their very lives to secure freedom of worship. Now that freedom of worship is in danger, a dark spirit of atheism and religious intolerance is found in America today, and this time there is not another "New World" to receive us as refugees. We have no choice but to restore America as the land of religious freedom. If not, this nation will perish and the world will perish.

I believe that God's hope is for freedom on the earth, and the greatest threat to freedom today is totalitarianism, particularly in the form of communism, which systematically opposes freedom of religion. Communism has killed more than 150 million people. Many of these were religious people. I myself suffered nearly to the point of death in a communist prison camp. Communism is the worst inhumanity in the world today.



Father and Mother Moon during a meeting with 2,500 clergy on April 16, 2001, in Washington, D.C.

Freedom has been retreating for the past decade. In 1975, freedom retreated from Southeast Asia. Millions of people perished. Nation after nation in Africa and Latin America has been communized. One-and-a-half billion people have fallen under communist tyranny. Now Central America, the backyard of the United States, is the front line of battle. I know that the enemies of freedom will not stop until they achieve their final goal: the conquest of this very nation, the United States of America.



Father and Mother Moon at the rally for religious freedom at New York City's Foley Square on October 22, 1981



Robert Grant, founding president of the American Freedom Coalition, Dr. Joseph Lowery, and In Jin Moon, daughter of Father and Mother Moon (front row, first, second and third from left), at a march for religious freedom on August 28, 1984

REGIONAL NEWS

UPF PARTNERS WITH THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES FOR INTERFAITH CONFERENCE

Written by Heiner Handschin and Chantal Chételat Komagata, UPF-EUME

UPF was a co-sponsor of a World Interfaith Harmony Week event with the World Council of Churches (WCC). “Religion in Service to Peace, Human Dignity and Justice for All” was held on February 7, 2023, in the Ecumenical Centre of the WCC, located in Geneva, Switzerland.

The one-day conference was organized jointly by the WCC and the Europe-Middle East branch of UPF’s Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), together with Women’s Federation for World Peace International and the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace, two organizations that are affiliated with UPF, and local partners Geneva Spiritual Appeal, Fondation de l’Entre-connaissance (“Mutual Knowledge Foundation”), Geneva Interfaith Intercultural Alliance, and Fribourg Peace Forum.

In the opening session, Rev. Dr. Kuzipa Nalwamba, the WCC’s program director for unity, mission, and ecumenical

formation, read a letter to the conference participants written by the newly elected WCC general secretary, Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay, who couldn’t be present due to conflicting schedules. Welcoming the participants to the Ecumenical Centre, Dr. Pillay mentioned the six areas in which the WCC has been working on an interfaith level: peace in the Middle East, children, stateless people, migration, ecumenical education and formation, as well as all forms of discrimination.

This was followed by two sessions on the themes “Religion in Service to Peace, Human Dignity and Justice for All” and “Sustaining Peace through Solidarity among Faith Communities.”



1 Opening session panelists (left to right): Hafid Ouadiri, president, Fondation de l’Entre-connaissance; Heiner Handschin, coordinator, IAPD Europe and Middle East; Rev. Dr. Kuzipa Nalwamba, program director for unity, mission, and ecumenical formation, WCC; Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, co-chair, UPF Europe and Middle East

2 Session 1 panelists (left to right): Rev. Dr. Abraham Silo Wilar, WCC program director for interfaith dialogue; session moderator Rabbi Aristide Cornelius De-Carli, president, Youth Segment, GIAA; Mohamed Levrack, deputy director, Grand Mosque, Geneva; and, by video, Rev. Dr. William A. McComish, dean emeritus, St. Peter’s Cathedral, Geneva

3 Session 2 panelists (left to right): Professor Dr. Michel Veuthey, Order of Malta; Rabbi François Garai, president, Geneva Spiritual Appeal; session moderator Francine Bielawski, board member, Center for Liaison and Information, CLIMS; Professor Dr. (Emeritus) Adrian Holderegger, University of Fribourg; Professor Boumediene Benyahia, renowned Islamic scholar

SPEECH EXCERPT BY DR. ADRIAN HOLDEREGGER

PRESIDENT, FRIBOURG PEACE FORUM; PROFESSOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF FRIBOURG, SWITZERLAND



The example of Ukraine shows us that the decisive threat to our peace lies in the radical questioning of the right of states to self-determination, in the threat to democracy and the values which constitute it. ... Let us take the important pastoral constitution of the [Second Vatican Council], *Gaudium et spes* [“Joy and Hope”], which reflects the Church’s relationship to

the world and therefore also its relationship to political conflicts, aggression, and violence. It defends an ethical pacifism of peace, marked by the conviction that conflicts between states can be solved in ways other than international wars, and that other ways of resolving conflicts must be sought, for example through diplomacy, the peace activities of civil society, and economic aid. This amounts to a paradigm shift.

REGIONAL NEWS

WHY RELIGIONS AND CULTURES IN DIALOGUE MATTER FOR ACHIEVING THE UN SDGS

Written by Peter Haider, president, UPF-Austria

UPF-EUME co-sponsored a World Interfaith Harmony Week event at the UN Vienna offices on February 3, 2023, together with WFP and YSP, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the UN Correspondents' Association Vienna, and the Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations.

The two sessions were "Why Religions and Cultures in Dialogue Matter," chaired by Dr. Afsar Rathor, a former UN diplomat and president of LIOS-SOIL, and "Interfaith and the United Nations' SDGs" moderated by Dr. Farida

Valiullina, UPF's liaison at the UN Vienna offices.

H.E. Dr. Haitham Abu Alfoul, ambassador of Jordan to Austria, explained that WIHW originally was proposed by King Abdullah II, who believed that the positive values entrenched in religions would enable a secure world. H.E. Dr. Eglantina Gjermeni, ambassador of Albania to the international organizations in Vienna, emphasized the need for religious freedom and highlighted Albania as an example of interreligious harmony in Europe.



1 Session I panelists (left to right): Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, co-chair, UPF EUME; Professor Dr. Paul M. Zulehner, theologian and professor of sociology of religion; H.E. Dr. Haitham Abu Alfoul, ambassador of Jordan to Austria; Dr. Afsar Rathor, former UN diplomat and president of LIOS-SOIL; H.E. Dr. Eglantina Gjermeni, ambassador of Albania to the international organizations in Vienna; Dr. Elmar Kuhn, president, Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations; Peter Haider, president, UPF-Austria

2 The conference at the United Nations' Vienna offices had an audience of about 200.



AL-LIQA' CONFERENCE ON "THE REALITY OF THE CHURCH AND CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST"

By UPF Middle East staff

Bethlehem, Palestine—The Al-Liqa' Center for Religion, Heritage and Cultural Studies in the Holy Land held its 29th Annual International Conference on November 25 and 26, 2022. The conference, on the theme "The Reality of the Church and Christians in the Middle East," was co-sponsored by the Universal Peace Federation. There were approximately 60 people attending the conference in person at the Convention Palace in Bethlehem. In addition, there were about 25 online connections. The conference consisted of six sessions over the two-day period.

The speakers emphasized truth, love, conscience, justice, and responsibility, as the presence of these virtues proves the Christian existence and identity, and their absence destroys Christians and non-Christians alike, disintegrates the family, spreads violence, and prevents progress. They stressed the need to pay attention to reality, especially scientific and technological progress and its impact on the Christian personality, the family and the universal Church, and to what affects and is affected by our youth and children, and the problems that affect the family, from its inception to the hour of its end.



1 Dr. Yousef Zaknoun, director, Al-Liqa' Center

2 Dr. Maha Karkabi Sabbah, director, Interdisciplinary Centre for Family Studies

3 Bishop Rafic Nahra, Latin patriarchal vicar of Galilee

4 His Beatitude Pierre Battista Pizzaballa, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem

5 Dr. Vera Baboun, former mayor of Bethlehem

6 Msgr. Renzo Pegoraro, chancellor, Pontifical Academy for Life

7 Mr. George Bassous, general manager, Convention Palace, Bethlehem

8 Bishop Munib Younan, Palestinian emeritus bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

REGIONAL NEWS

YOUNG ACHIEVERS AWARDS 2022

By Robin Marsh, secretary general, UPF-UK

Inspiring stories were told by the 22 recipients of UPF-UK's Young Achiever Awards for 2022 during a ceremony in the House of Commons on 22 November, hosted by Hon. Shaun Bailey MP. The Young Achiever Awards recognize young people who have gone above and beyond in the service of others. One by one, the 22 awardees stood up and spoke about the journey they have walked, before receiving their award from a Member of Parliament.

A follow-up program was held in the UPF-UK HQ on 14 January 2023. It was a high-spirited event attended by many of the awardees from last year and some from previous years. The main speakers at the event were Hon. Dean Russell MP, Dr. Michael Balcomb, the president of FFWPU-UK, and Nathaniel Peat, a former Young Achiever. They all made excellent contributions to the program, encouraging the awardees.



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1 Former young achiever Nathaniel Peat
 2 Hon. Dean Russell MP, Member of Parliament for Watford
 3 The participants of the follow-up event at UPF-UK headquarters

UPDATES FROM RUSSIA

Written by Maria Nazarova, president, UPF-Russia



UPF-Moscow leader Dmitry Samko presents an Ambassador for Peace certificate to Samara artist Oksana Tsepova, a master of botanical bas-relief. UPF's International Association of Arts and Culture for Peace (IAACP) held a meeting at Samara's Arterika art space dedicated to the Year of Cultural Heritage of the Peoples of Russia.



UPF-Russia President Maria Nazarova interviewed Dr. Sergey Ostroumov, leading researcher at the Faculty of Biology of Lomonosov Moscow State University.



Elena Knyazeva of UPF-Russia (standing, fourth from right) gave a presentation at the Voronezh Regional Scientific Library about the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

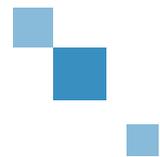


Elena Knyazeva of UPF (second from left) receives a certificate of appreciation for her efforts to spread environmental awareness.

REGIONAL NEWS

WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

The Official UN Observance in the 1st Week of February



In 2010, the UN designated the first week of February as World Interfaith Harmony Week. From the outset, UPF has actively supported this initiative, both at the United Nations and with UPF chapters around the world. Below are a few

representative programs organized by the Europe and Middle East branch of UPF to celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week 2023. For more information, visit www.worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com



United Kingdom – Speakers in the UK event “Speaking Truth to Power”: Sheikh Nuru Mohammed, co-chair of Citizens UK in Birmingham; Dr. Harriet Crabtree OBE of the Interfaith Network UK; Paul Gutteridge, former director of Initiatives of Change; and Dr. Lakshmi Vyas, president of the Hindu Forum of Europe.



Czech Republic – UPF-Czechia together with the Community of Christians in Prague and IAPD organized a meeting of religious leaders on 2 February.



Italy – “Freedom of Religion, Belief and Conscience: Foundation for Dignity and Human Development” was the theme of the online roundtable held by UPF-Italy on 7 February.



Denmark – Maria Benedikte Fihl, pastor at the Evangelical Lutheran Church, addresses “Brotherhood Between Religions,” UPF-Denmark’s celebration on 4 February at Nathanael’s Church.



Moldova – Forty-three people, representing Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Gagauzia, India, Moldova, and Ukraine, attended the event in Chisinau, Moldova.



Norway – A candle for peace, lit by Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian representatives, at the program in Oslo, Norway, on 9 February.



Russia – Dmitry Samko of UPF-Moscow interviewed the Imam of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque, Marat Hazrat Arshabayev, and in Voronezh UPF organized a visit to the local synagogue.

REGIONAL NEWS

UPF-EUME CO-SPONSORS FAMILY CONFERENCE IN ALBANIA

Written by Artan Kurti, UPF-EUME



1 Dr. Eva Allushi, deputy rector of Aleksandër Moisiu University in Durrës, Albania

2 Dr. Jelena Tanasijević, professor at Singidunum University in Belgrade, Serbia

3 Professor Dr. Edmond Hajrizi, president of the University of Business and Technology, Kosovo

4 Professor Dr. Përparim Kabo, dean, Psychological, Social and Political Sciences Faculty, Mediterranean University of Albania

UPF together with the Professors World Peace Academy (PWPA) held a Conference on the Family under the theme “Family, Society and Universal Values.” The conference, held on November 19, 2022, in UPF’s Peace Embassy in Tirana, brought together experts on the family and society.

Session I on “The Family – Facing the Challenges of Today’s World, Regional and Local Developments” featured Dr. Saemira Pino, a former Albanian deputy minister of education and health; Prof. Dr. Edmond Hajrizi, president of the University of Business and Technology, Kosovo; Harry Benson, research director of the Marriage Foundation, United Kingdom; Prof. Dr. Jelena Tanasijević, Singidunum University in Belgrade, Serbia; and Dr. Eva Allushi, deputy rector of Aleksandër Moisiu University in Durrës, Albania.

Session II on “The Family as the Bearer of Cultural Values” was moderated by Dr. Eva Çipi, chair of UPF-Albania, and included Dr. Thomas Selover, the president of PWPA International, and his wife, Dr. Grace Selover; Dr. Frank



Dr. Thomas Selover giving the opening remarks



Presentation of prize to Gjylsiana Veli from Numani School in Fieri, with (left) Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, Chairman UPF EUME, and (right) Dr. Saemira Pino, former Albanian deputy minister of education and health

Kaufmann, president of PWPA-USA; Professor Dr. Afet Mamuti, professor of family law at the Faculty of Law of the University of Tetovo in North Macedonia; Professor Dr. Përparim Kabo, dean of the Faculty of Psychological, Social and Political Sciences at the Mediterranean University of Albania; Dr. Aneta Filiposka, coordinator of the Initiative for Civic Integration in North Macedonia; and Yoshihiro Yamazaki, coordinator of UPF-EUME’s International Association of Academicians for Peace.

The conference concluded with the presentation of the winners of a youth essay competition on the theme of family. The two prize winners were Gjylsiana Veli from Numani School in Fier and Xhoel Thomai from Elita School in Vlora.

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contact@eume.upf.org · www.eume.upf.org

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UPCOMING EVENTS

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|---------------|---|
| May 2-6, 2023 | Summit 2023 and Leadership Conference in Korea |
| June 2023 | "No Peace Without Women" Conference in Kosovo |
| October 2023 | Joint UPF Conference with the Podgorica Club in North Macedonia |
| December 2023 | Conference on Human Rights at the European Parliament |

See the calendar of events at www.eume.upf.org/agenda/events