

## UPF and IAPD Africa Webinar: Which Direction Should Africa Take

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More than 1,000 religious leaders from across Africa and beyond took part in the Webinar organized by the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) Africa. The event was on Zoom and live-streamed on YouTube and Facebook in English, French, and Portuguese.

The purpose of this webinar was to create a platform for spiritual and religious leaders of Africa to reflect on which direction Africa should take at this point in time as well as sensitize them on the need to help political leaders in making spiritually responsible decisions for the continent in terms of the threats of secularism and persecution of religious people, family breakdown, interreligious conflicts, and environmental degradation.

In his welcoming remarks, Imboni Dr. Radebe, as Chairman of IAPD-Africa, said, "I can never reiterate enough how grateful I am to True Mother for establishing IAPD Africa because it is through IAPD that we as Africans, particularly spiritual and religious leaders, can come together and deliberate and find solutions to Africa's problems." He welcomed and thanked all the participants for agreeing to take part in this webinar. "It is important that we all understand and accept that there is no restoration at any level without first restoring the spirituality of the people," Imboni said.

Rev. George Ogurie, the moderator, gave a report on IAPD. He commended the IAPD-Africa's activities since the appointment of its Chairman. He particularly emphasized the Special Interreligious Leadership Conference of 59 African leaders that took place in Korea in August 2022 which saw the signing of a resolution to have IAPD-Africa as an Advisory Body to the African Union. He also reported on the two celebrations of Africa Spiritual Day in Johannesburg, South Africa, and Calabar, Nigeria following a meeting of IAPD in Mozambique.

The first keynote speaker was Mr. Michael Swain, Executive Director of Freedom of Religion South Africa (FORSA). He spoke on "The Threat of Secularism and Religious Persecution." He said, "Secularism has become the primary driver of social change in the societies of the so-called, Western world." He then described the common term used today, "wokeism" that seeks to "overthrow the traditional views and values upon which our societies have been built." He took the example of South Africa where in the name of equity and equality, not only the LGBTQ+ community is pushing beyond tolerance of sexual orientation and to have young school children indoctrinated in the fluidity of gender concepts and definitions of what is a man or woman. Here state institutions are pushing the idea that the individual perception of gender supersedes the biological and genetic binary certainty of your sex. In educational institutions, parental rights are being undermined as they have no say or knowledge on what their children are being taught in schools.

This is giving rise to a "cancel culture" which singles out and makes examples of those who stand against woke ideology, which tolerates no dissent. According to Mr. Michael Swain, "The only way to oppose this is to stand firm on our right to religious freedom and on our right as parents to raise our own children according to our own faith, values, and traditions."

In conclusion, he said, "It is therefore certain that there will be greater conflicts ahead that we will only

overcome if we unite around our common cause in the fight for faith and freedom. For the sake of our children, we cannot afford to fail!"

The second keynote speaker was Dr. Tageldin Hamad, IAPD International Coordinator and Vice-President of UPF International. His topic was "Universal Values Held by All Faith Traditions". Dr. Hamad listed and explained values like love and compassion, justice and fairness, truth and honesty, forgiveness and mercy, humility and modesty, integrity and moral conduct, peace and non-violence, respect for Life, generosity and charity, and the value of unity and community.



Dr. Hamad noted that "while these values are shared among many faith traditions, there may be variations in their interpretations and emphasis within each specific religion." And "Most important, the calling for the leaders of all faith traditions is to work together in harmony to solve humanity's problems today." He concluded by citing IAPD founder, True Mother, who said: "History is calling for reconciliation, compassion, love, service and sacrifice. Today's problems cannot be solved by the 'logic of power... our present problems can only be solved by the logic of love."

The third speaker, Dr. Frank Kaufmann, Executive Director of the Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace, spoke on "Family Breakdown and the Various Faith Traditions". Dr. Kaufmann in his intervention distinguished two kinds of immorality: sexual immorality and social immorality. He said, "Sexual immorality is the highest, most demonic, and most egregious of all wrongdoing. It attacks the most fragile, tender, elevated, sacred part of people, namely their love. It attacks our deepest point that makes life meaningful. Sexual immorality attacks in other people, their very source of hope, trust, and every basis for a noble and dignified life." While, "Social immorality on the hand attacks life. It arises from a demonic addiction to wealth, power, and the sick obsession to control people and exploit the fruits of their lives. For even a small bit of personal gain, people are willing to impoverish the lives of others. To deprive them and their children of their basic needs, their dignity, education, and opportunity. This is immoral."

Concerning the family, Dr. Kaufmann said, "The family is the touchpoint between heaven and earth. It is the place meant to translate the dream of God into reality on earth ... If this breaks down, the very secret of life gets deformed and broken." He advised all spiritual and religious leaders to turn every last penny and every last breath in their religion to raise their believers to cherish, nurture, and grow God's free gift of love that is given through family. And thus, "This will fix our troubles."

In his intervention as fourth speaker, Father Louison Emerick Bissila Mbila, Chaplain of the Catholic Church at the African Union, on, "Preventing interreligious conflict: The role of religious and spiritual leaders," said, "When political power has sought to direct religious affairs, religious and spiritual leaders have found themselves participating in or fueling sometimes bloody conflicts." He said because a religious leader wants to win "souls," you can't blame him if he may enter into conflict with others in the city or community, because religion can't survive without followers. "The real issue is to ensure that conflicts involving several religions do not turn into religiously motivated violence," Father Mbila said. For this, he said, spiritual and religious leaders need to make "an adjustment of the mind to God's vision and action. All true conversion involves turning away from one way of seeing and acting and entering into a new state of mind." The Chaplain went on to say, the religious or spiritual leader should be a man of dialogue. "When religious leaders talk, dialogue, and pray together, they send a powerful message to their followers: if we can do it, so can you!"

He then proposed the democratization of dialogue by allowing the masses or members to also be involved in the dialogue. He also proposed the need to make the transition from coexistence and tolerance to cooperation, i.e. working together. "One of the most effective ways of preventing violent conflict is to find solutions to the current conflicts in Africa."

In conclusion, "The spirituality of encounter that opens the way to dialogue, the education of the masses in the culture of dialogue and interreligious cooperation are the royal roads to preventing religiously motivated violence and building lasting peace," Father Mbila said.

Dr. Paterné Zinsou, UPF-Africa Vice-President and Coordinator of IAPP, was the fifth keynote speaker. He spoke on "Environmental Degradation: The Role of Spiritual and Religious Leaders". From the outset, he said, "We face a crisis that stems from our failure to recognize our interconnectedness as human beings and to live in harmony with our planet. By neglecting our collective responsibility to the natural world, we have eroded the very foundations of our existence."

He went on to enumerate the different sectors impacted by environmental degradation such as water (pollution of the oceans, rivers, dams, etc., that affects biodiversity), economy (soil and farmland degradation, deforestation, desertification, etc.), and health (air pollution), etc.

Industrial pollution and gas emissions, to which can be added climate change and its consequences, global warming, soil impoverishment, etc.

"Religious leaders," Dr. Zinsou said, "should have a clearer and deeper approach and understanding of solutions and wise responses to environmental degradation, based on the original principles revealed by God about the creation of the natural world and its governance."

He pointed out that there is one prerequisite for good stewardship of nature: we must learn to live in harmony with other human beings. This is the foundation for God's children. He quoted the founders of UPF on the cause of our lack of stewardship and how it can be solved:

"The whole of creation is lamenting because the Fall has turned everything upside down. This is why the things of creation are in the waiting of the sons of God, who have the authority to put an end to the realm of lamentations. Ultimately, only the families of God's sons can rule creation. Creation is waiting for this moment, and it's up to religion to bring about this change." Thus, he went on to stress the role of spiritual and religious leaders by using quotes from the different Holy Scriptures.

In his congratulatory remarks, Rev. Bakary Camara, Heavenly Africa Cheon Eui Won Co-Chairman, said, "I am happy that we have all realized that we must charter our own path. Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, our True Mother, believes so too. That is why since Senegal in January 2018, she has been asking us to work with her. She strongly believes that in Africa, spirituality is still alive and thus, would like spiritual and religious leaders of Africa to promote it and use it as the foundation for all our endeavors."

He said True Mother is counting on each and every one of us to bring to the attention of our political leaders the need to be rooted in spirituality. Through this, we will easily build an Africa of interdependence, mutual prosperity, and universally shared values.

He then encouraged the spiritual and religious leaders of Africa to mobilize each time their members to take part in the Africa Spiritual Day events. He congratulated everyone for taking part in the webinar and making it a successful event.

Imboni Dr. Radebe in his closing remarks thanked all the panelists for their wonderful and insightful presentations as well as the participants for their support. He also said, "I am truly humbled by your efforts to work towards building a peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous Africa where we can all live together." And "Let us not get tired of fighting, protecting, and promoting true African values, morals, culture, and traditions."

The opening invocations were given by President Derrick Sibisi, President of The Revelation Spiritual Home (TRSH), and Rev. Dr. Bukelwa Hans, pastor of the United Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, and former Ambassador of South Africa to Finland and Estonia; while the closing invocation was given by Father Louison Mbila.

The musical offerings were given by TRSH Choir and the Sunhak Peace Choir from Benin.

## **Reflections**

Rev. Dr. Bukelwa Hans

Medical Doctor, Pastor of the United Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, former Ambassador of South Africa to Finland and Estonia, and former member of the Parliament of South Africa. "Thank you for inviting me to take part in this wonderful event. I really enjoyed the presentations."

@JeanAugustinGhoms

Great webinar! Special thanks to all the speakers. African spiritual and religious leaders must wake up and stand together alongside our political leaders to keep Africa out of the woke culture. We need to promote spirituality at all costs to ensure a true sustainable development, that is God-centered, in Africa. It was wonderful! #Spiritualitymustlead!!!

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Great webinar...The Foundation of Africans is the African Spirituality

Great webinar humble thanks to the speakers...I'm really enlightened...#SpiritualityMustLead

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African Spirituality is the foundation of Africans.