

UPF Copenhagen, Denmark's Peace Road 2018 Peace March and Symposium

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Copenhagen, Denmark -- UPF-Denmark's Peace Road 2018 event started with a peace march that was followed by a symposium with the theme "How to Promote Dialogue." The symposium was hosted by Jacob Holdt in his Ubuntu House; Mr. Holdt became internationally known in the 1970s by creating the book of photography *American Pictures*, showing the hardships of America's poor people. He continues to be a peace activist and collaborates with several peace organizations.

The event was organized together with Minhaj Youth Denmark and took place on Sunday afternoon, November 18th.

At first the participants gathered at the Copenhagen City Hall Square, where hot soup was being served. At 1:30 pm the march started along a pedestrian street in the busy city center to Ubuntu-House. The march was accompanied by selected music pieces interspersed with inspirational quotes.

Zoraiz Khushdil, chairman of Minhaj Youth Denmark, moderated the symposium with much humor and warmth. Thorkil Christensen, cochairman of UPF-Denmark, introduced the background of the Peace Road initiative and showed a short promotional video.

The poet Mazen Ismail was the first speaker. Mr. Ismail, who was born in Beirut, Lebanon, came with his parents to Denmark as refugees. He grew up in his family in a Danish provincial town, where he experienced bullying, tension and exclusion. At the age of 17 he had nine knife wounds and ended up in prison. During this time Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales and other poetry made deep impressions on him. After his release he started to explore music, write song lyrics and perform in the theater. His band, Lagix, soared to the top of radio charts in the Middle East with the single "Love You." In 2014, he founded the consultancy "Talte Tanker" [spoken thoughts], aiming to strengthen young people's professional, personal and creative skills in collaboration with educational institutions, job centers and local governments.

At this event, Mr. Ismail shared three of his poems. He emphasized empathy and the need to listen in order to understand other people's situations and feelings. Many of the young people present were especially touched by the depth of his thoughts and poetry.



Christopher Roehl Andersen, member of the Copenhagen City Council and former chairman of Social Liberal Youth in Denmark, was the second speaker. He stated that it is important to be curious about each other, to try to understand the feelings and motivations of other people, and to always enter into dialogue with an open mind. The only risk, he reminded us, is that we could change our own opinion or standpoint. Participation as citizens is essential, he said, because it is a prerequisite for our own shared freedom. Dialogue, or conversation, is necessary to ensure our collective freedom: Dialogue means democracy in practice.

The speakers were followed by a dance performance by the modern Afro-ballet Root Astray.

During the refreshment break, there was very happy and lively sharing among all participants over coffee and cake. Subsequently, we had a panel debate focused on how to promote and inspire dialogue and stronger and deeper relationships in our community and nation. In conclusion, James Houston and Elizabeth Bramsen sang two beautiful songs.

This event marked the first time that UPF-Denmark held a symposium in conjunction with the Peace Road project, and we see some potential to develop this in the future.