

## 20. International Day of Families

Vienna, Austria, 17. May 2014

In commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family UPF-Austria in cooperation with the Family Federation and the Women's Federation for World Peace hosted a conference in Vienna on May 17th 2014. As an introduction UPF-Austria president Peter Haider read the message of UN secretary general Ban Ki-Moon for this special day stating: "By providing economic and emotional sustenance to their members, families can raise productive, caring citizens committed to the common good. Strong, well-functioning families, whatever form they may take, can help reduce poverty, improve the wellbeing of mothers, promote gender equality and uphold human rights. On this International Day of Families, let us strive to strengthen these small but critical units found in every society so that we may advance as one human family toward greater progress."

The speakers included Mag. Josef Missethon, a business consultant and family therapist, Mag. Maria Neuberger-Schmidt, author of several educational books and founder of the "Parents' Workshop" organization, Dr. Zhannat Kosmukhamedova working with the motto "Prevention is a Family issue" at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Dr. Peter Amann, a family therapist.



**Mag. Josef Missethon** spoke about how the value system within the society influences families in their everyday lives: "Values are like stars. They might be unreachable, but when darkness comes they guide us on our way". The value system creates a certain attitude towards life, and the attitude is reflected in the actions one takes. He also talked about the various roles one takes up during one's lifetime, such as being a parent and/or fulfilling one's responsibilities in a profession at a working place. Finally he explained about the government's goals for the families in Austria: Equalization of burdens between families with and without children; Avoidance of physical, psychological and sexual violence in the family context; strengthening the competence of fathers and mothers; Compatibility of family life and job responsibilities; Strengthening children and youth in becoming self-reliant personalities.



**Mag. Maria Neuberger-Schmidt** addressed current family policies in Austria, which she described in this way: "Recently family politics have complied with the reality of families, but have not given any guidelines or goals. There is a broad consensus on patchwork-families as well as a discussion on homosexual couples raising children, but no one seems to ask the children what they would prefer themselves." In a TV discussion Mrs. Neuberger-Schmidt raised her voice for the father-mother-child family, which brought her discreditation and even persecution afterwards. She then stated: "Politicians should help all families alike, regardless which state they are in, but on the level of society we have to acknowledge that children need a father and a mother."



**Dr. Zhannat Kosmukhamedova** spoke about the father's role in child education. The father is the one who enlarges the intimate circle of the mother-child relationship, thus introducing the child into the wider society beyond the sphere of the family. He usually is the one who teaches strategic planning and is the partner to play games, thus supporting the further socialization of the child. Building a society begins with

the father: he is the one who permits and prohibits. When such functions are discouraged, society is running wild, justice is not respected, the teachers are not listened to, the police are under attack, etc.

As Dr. Zhannat works in the field of drugs and crime prevention she spoke about the importance of healthy families explaining her organization's program for the prevention of drug use, HIV/AIDS and crime among young people through family skills training programs. The key points of the UNODC'S approach are: Violence prevention, avoiding maltreatment and aggressive behavior in children, improve problem-solving and other cognitive abilities and social development in kids, increase retention in school, improve learning achievement.



As a final speaker **Dr. Peter Amann** explained about his work helping individuals who disintegrated from their family and society. He provides temporary shelter for them in an adapted farm building and in a house which he built additionally. He uses Viktor Frankl's method of logotherapy in order to help his patients to find meaning and purpose in their lives again. Dr. Amann was a student of Viktor Frankl himself, with whom he shared a personal friendship. His final statement: "The 21st century will be a century where people will have to find their purpose again!"

**Mag. Elisabeth Cook** led a lively discussion and a session of questions and answers. The highlight of the event was then a performance of the Slovakian children's Folk Dance group Rozmarin. 25 children aged 5-15 performed dances and demonstrated what family really is all about as they were accompanied by their parents, grandparents and their brothers and sisters. Everyone was carried by the spirit created by the music and the excitement of the children and youngsters performing in front of such a big crowd. Afterwards everybody enjoyed the food from the buffet which concluded the event.

*Mag. Elisabeth Cook und Peter Haider*



Peter Haider & Mrs. Helen Steiner, leader of the childrens' dance group

