

UPF Netherlands celebrates World Interfaith Harmony Week in Amsterdam

Willem Koetsier
February 3, 2024



This meeting took place on Saturday afternoon, February 3 from 1 to 3:30 PM in the Scientology Chapel, Wibautstraat 112 in Amsterdam as a joint project of Scientology and UPF Netherlands.

MC, Mrs. Gerbrig Deinum, welcomed everyone and explained the origins of the World Interfaith Harmony Week. In the autumn of 2010, Jordan's King Abdullah II came up with this initiative. On behalf of the King, Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad explained the proposal, from which Gerbrig Deinum read out the following two points:

"In the very title of the resolution and in the second operative paragraph and elsewhere, the word 'harmony' is used in the Chinese sense of the term. We add it to the term 'tolerance' (which we have also used) because 'tolerance' can suggest that the other is so negative they have to be 'tolerated'; we cannot use 'acceptance' because it implies that religions accept each other's doctrines rather than their right to those doctrines and this is not the case; we cannot use the term 'peace' alone because it suggests merely the absence of war, and not necessarily the absence of hatred. Only the Confucian concept of 'harmony' can rescue us here because it suggests not merely 'peace', but also 'beautiful and dynamic interaction between different elements within a whole'.

In the third operative paragraph, there is mention of 'Love of God and Love of the Neighbor, or Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbor'. Why is this religious reference necessary in a UN resolution? In answer to this question, it will be noted first that this draft resolution is unique because it is specifically about peace between religions and not about anything else, therefore the inclusion of some religious references in this particular case is only natural. To rigidly maintain the contrary would be to disregard the feelings of 85% of the world's population who belong to one faith or another."

After the introduction, there was a musical intermezzo by Hans Campman (piano) and Eleanor Flowers (vocals). Next, keynote speaker, Mr. Bart ten Broek, was announced. He was a headmaster at a Christian elementary school in Ede, which became a model for cooperation between Christians and Muslims. In the 1980's, the children of Muslims came to Christian schools. Initially, the Muslims had to participate in the Christian way of working, but it became clear that there was a need to pay attention to their background and values.

Bart explained how this challenge set him on the path to strive for interfaith encounters and cooperation in his school, but also beyond. Connecting instead of opposing each other became his goal. It's about seeing people as they really are and giving them the opportunity to express their views. Involved in this process were parents, children, teachers, school boards and government representatives.

Sometimes there were fights in the schoolyard and friction between the Christians and Muslims. Bart

decided to bring the parents from the different cultures together in a meeting. He prevented a discussion about dogmas and rather proposed to look at the core of the stories about Jesus seen from the different religious beliefs. This is to respect each other's differences and still want to work together for the well-being of the school and the children. For this purpose, the team of teachers, the government inspector, parents, children and even the neighborhood started to work together to create what became "The Encounter School". The school became an example of an interfaith community, centering on what binds us together, recognized by the government and even visited by Queen Beatrice.



In the last part of the meeting, the participants sat in a circle, and everyone could share something of his or her background and perspectives on Interfaith Cooperation. Also, there was time for questions and answers. After the meeting, the participants expressed their appreciation for this event.

The following is an excerpt from H.M. King Abdullah II's World Interfaith Harmony Week proposal at the UN delivered by H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad.



Second and more importantly perhaps we include these references because whilst we all agree that it is clearly not the business of the UN to engage in theology, it is nevertheless the primary goal of the UN to make and safeguard peace, and without the specific mention of God and of the Two Commandments of Love [see: Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-31] many if not most devout Muslims, Christians and Jews will consider a secular call for an interfaith harmony week a feckless platitude that they cannot fully or sincerely support. For in the Holy Bible Jesus Christ u (echoing the words of Deuteronomy) said: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word

of God [Luke 4:4 and Matthew 4:4, see also: Deuteronomy 8:2-3] and also that: Hallowed be Thy Name [Matthew, 6:9], and similar meanings are to be found in the Holy Qur'an wherein it is stated that no act is rewarded Save for seeking the Countenance of .[the] Lord, the Most High [Al-Layl, 92:19-20] and that: Verily the Remembrance of God is of all things the greatest [from: Al-Ankabut, 29:45]. In other words, for many Muslims, Christians and Jews who together make up perhaps 55% of the world's population and (I regret to say) are involved in most of the world's conflicts it is necessary to mention the Substance of their faiths. Otherwise, hoping to foster peace between religions by foisting upon them an external and purely secular and bureaucratic language is simply a house divided against itself which shall not stand [Matthew, 12:25].

Third, it will be noted that this language excludes no one, of any religion or of no faith at all: every person of good will, with or without faith can and should commit to Love of the Neighbour and Love of God or Love of the Neighbour and Love of the Good. Loving the neighbour and the good is after all the essence of good will. And referring to 'the Good' obviously does not necessarily imply belief in God or in a particular religion, even though for many believers 'the Good' is God precisely: Jesus Christ said: 'No one is Good but God Alone' [Mark, 10:18; Luke 18:19, and Matthew 19:17], and 'the Good' ('Al-Barr') is one of God's Names in the Holy Qur'an [Al-Tur, 52:28]. Thus speaking of 'the Good' is a theologically-correct but inclusive formula in so far as it goes that unites all humanity and leaves out no one. Fourth, there is another reason why it is specifically necessary to mention love of the neighbour: it sets an invaluable practical standard based upon which people can ask themselves and each other if their actions stem from caritas (love) towards the neighbour or not. Indeed, as the Prophet Muhammad r said: "None of you has faith [in God] until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself." [Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Iman, Vol. p.67, Hadith no.45].