

United Nation's World Interfaith Harmony Week

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Last night Universal Peace Federation -UK held a meeting in Parliament to remember the Holocaust, to examine the dynamics of forgiveness, reconciliation and remorse. This was held to commemorate the UN's World Interfaith Harmony week. There were many precious contributions and stirring testimonies. Chaired by Rev. Dr. Marcus Braybrooke, President of World Congress of Faiths, the event featured presentations by Marina Cantacuzio, founder of the Forgiveness Project, Jack Lynes, Chair of Harrow Bereavement Care and a leading member of the Jewish community for interfaith, Shaykh Dr Hazim Fazlic, a Bosnian Imam now in Birmingham, Ruth Barnett, a Holocaust & Genocide Educator as well as a Kindertransport child, Jack Corley, Chairman of the Universal Peace Federation-UK and Sukhbir Singh who introduced the Forgiveness Charter on behalf of Bhai Mohinder Sahib Singh, spiritual leader of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha - Birmingham UK. Imam Dr Abduljalil Sajid JP attended the meeting and presented a paper on 'Forgiveness and Reconciliation: From an Islamic Perspective' to accompany the report.



Marina Cantacuzio writes on her website, 'Forgiveness is an inspiring, complex, exasperating subject, which provokes strong feeling in just about everyone. Having spent all of 2003 collecting stories of reconciliation and forgiveness for an exhibition of words and images which I created with the photographer, Brian Moody, I began to see that for many people forgiveness is no soft option, but rather the ultimate revenge. For many it is a liberating route out of victimhood; a choice, a process, the final victory over those who have done you harm. As Mariane Pearl, the wife of murdered journalist Daniel Pearl, said of her husband's killers, "The only way to oppose them is by demonstrating the strength that they think they have taken from you."

The exhibition tells some extraordinary stories – stories of victims who have become friends with perpetrators, murderers who have turned their mind to peace building.

As I talked to friends, colleagues and strangers about this exhibition, I noticed that forgiveness cuts public opinion down the middle like a guillotine. There are those who see forgiveness as an immensely noble and humbling response to atrocity – and then there are those who simply laugh it out of court. For the first group, forgiveness is a value strong enough to put an end to the tit-for-tat settling of scores that has wreaked havoc over generations. But for the second group, forgiveness is just a copout, a weak gesture, which lets the violator off the hook and encourages only further violence. This is why we called the exhibition, *The F Word*. For some people forgiveness is a very dirty word indeed.



She added in her paper on 'Forgiveness', 'Forgiving someone does not mean you reconcile with them, it means taking hold of your painful emotions and deciding to let them go. (It means) a refusal to let the pain of past dictate the path of the future healing the memory of the harm, but not erasing it (not forgive & forget). If F is a *struggle for understanding*, then it's a realisation that, "if I had lived your life perhaps I would have made your choices". Forgiveness is not forgetting that something painful happened. By forgiving the people who hurt you, you do not erase painful past experiences from your memory. Those experiences have a great deal to teach you, both about not being victimized again and about not victimizing others.'

Jack Corley explained Rev. Sun Myung Moon's perspective on 'Forgiveness and Reconciliation' particularly in his meeting with the late North Korean President Kim Il Sung. He also elucidated the principles behind the forgiveness earned by Jacob from his older Brother Esau.

He added that gestures are very important in higher levels of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace building. He highlighted the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Ireland in 2011 that won her great respect from the Irish people. The 1977 visit of Anwar Sadat to the Israeli Knesset was a gesture that opened the way to peace between two nations that had been frequently at war.

He asked where the religious leaders were when there are efforts for peace? Universal Peace Federation's founder Rev. Dr Sun Myung Moon has promoted the establishment of an Interreligious Council at the UN. There religious leaders, who business is peace, centred on the wisdom of their faith built up over many generations, can take an innovative approach from politicians whose agenda and focus is different.

The Universal Peace Federation seeks reconciliation on many levels. However as we are now sitting in

Parliament we do want to urge our political leaders to establish or maintain the moral foundation that is necessary for peace and reconciliation.

Rev Dr Marcus Braybrooke introduced the evening with a prepared speech saying, 'Interfaith Harmony week is so important. Sadly so often in the past religious exclusivism and contempt for the other has been a contributory factor in the genocidal killings that scar human history. **It is time for people of faith to make deep apology to members of other faiths whom they have hurt and offended** as Pope John Paul II did at the Western Wall in Jerusalem It is also vital that as people of faith we work together for a more just and peaceful world. Some people have expressed surprise that we should link a belated observance of Holocaust Memorial day and World Interfaith Harmony Week. At first, I felt the same, but increasingly I have seen how appropriate it is. Rightly in a time of silence we shall remember the six million Jews and many others who died in the Holocaust and many more who have been slaughtered in terrible genocides - especially we pray for comfort to those whose family members died, and those who were injured.

But perhaps the least we can do in memory of the voluntary and involuntary sacrifice of so many people is to pray and act to ensure that such horrors are never repeated.

This is why Interfaith Harmony week is so important. Sadly so often in the past religious exclusivism and contempt for the other has been a contributory factor in the genocidal killings that scar human history. It is time for people of faith to make deep apology to members of other faiths whom they have hurt and offended as Pope John Paul II did at the Western Wall in Jerusalem It is also vital that as people of faith we work together for a more just and peaceful world

In a speech entitled **HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY, INTERFAITH HARMONY, FORGIVENESS AND HEALING**, **Ruth Barnett** explained that 'Forgiveness is an extremely complex issue which I see very much in terms of an individual process of self-acceptance. By this I mean acceptance of the aspects of our self that we would rather not own.'

'Reverend Braybrooke opened the evening by expressing the horror we all feel at the utter brutality and depravity of what was perpetrated in the Holocaust - and, sadly, in so many genocides and atrocities since. Expressing horror at such evil is natural and human but at the same time locates the atrocities outside ourselves. Forgiveness begins, in my opinion, by owning the capacity in oneself (which is part of every human being) for acting in this same evil manner. Only by owning our darkest thoughts, urges, ideas and interest in evil, are we in a position to take control and choose not to act violently but responsibly, not to retaliate or exact revenge but to seek understanding through dialogue.

'We need to develop the courage to care and the will to act before it is too late when atrocities against humanity are developing. In my opinion, the Holocaust could have been prevented if the Armenian Genocide, perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks under cover of WWI, had been brought to justice and closure. In the 50 years after the end of WWII, silence and disbelief inhibited the process of Holocaust acknowledgement and healing, which is even now not yet complete. This has created impunity for further violence and genocides, further traumatising and retreat into ignorance and indifference.'

'A part of the Holocaust has yet to be fully acknowledged, memorialised, compensated and closure through acceptance of the survivors. At least half a million Sinti and other Gypsies were deliberately murdered by the Nazis for the same reason that Jews were murdered - because the Nazis decided they could not fit into the Aryan 'master-race'. Since 1945 Roma/Gypsy/Travellers have been persistently and increasingly persecuted, evicted, deported, their homes torched or bulldozed, and murdered Gypsies not considered important enough by police to find the perpetrators. We have another genocide emerging under our noses all over Europe, including England. Are we going to develop the Courage to Care and the Will to intervene this time? Or are we going to allow the persecution and injustices suffered by Gypsies to

continue until the massacres begin?'

Imam Dr Abduljalil Sajid commented in his paper, 'Forgiveness and Reconciliation: An Islamic Perspective' that, 'The God, Allah is the ultimate power Who can forgive. Forgiveness means closing an account of offense against God or any of His creation. However, forgiveness must meet the criteria of sincerity. God, the All-Knowing, has the knowledge of everything including whatever a person thinks but does not express in words or deeds. An offense may be against (a) a person, (b) a group of persons or society, (c) other creation of God such as animals, plants, land, atmosphere, bodies of water and the life therein, and (d) God, Allah. Muslims understand that an offense against the creation of God is an offense against God.'