

World Summit Examines Religion's Role in Peacebuilding

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Seoul, Korea—The final plenary session of the 3rd World Summit focused on “Religious Voices for Peace and Development.”

Plenary Session VIII, which took place on August 29, 2015, in the InterContinental Grand Seoul Parnas hotel, was moderated by **Mr. David Fraser Harris**, regional secretary general, UPF-Middle East.

Religious leaders from various nations spoke on issues, challenges and opportunities that impact the world at this time. They also recommended ways in which religions, faith-based organizations, interfaith institutions and individual believers may contribute to the establishment of a world of peace, human flourishing and mutual prosperity for all people.

Ven. Dr. Bellanwila Wimalaratana, chancellor, Sri Jayawardenapura University, Sri Lanka, spoke about Buddhism and peace. All religions want peace and harmony, he said, but Buddhism denounces violence against life and property. “Everyone should speak in praise of whatever is conducive to peaceful, harmonious, anxiety- and fear-free living,” he said. Buddha taught that “one war leads to another, making it a vicious circle of wars.” Ven. Wimalaratana explained that “Buddha traces the origins of war to man’s untrained, undisciplined mind, polluted with all sorts of selfish motives and urges.” The attainment of inner peace is the solution. The major cause of war is leaders “who pay no attention to the well-being and happiness of the people,” he said. This is why “Buddha highlighted the importance of righteousness in any system of good governance.” The establishment of peace requires the alleviation of poverty, social inequality and discrimination.



Dr. Mustafa Ceric, grand mufti emeritus of Sarajevo, Bosnia, spoke about the genocide that took place during the Bosnian War (1992-95), which he called the worst war since the Second World War. The mufti

said a higher power allowed him to survive—“in order to testify before you today that the law is not in the books; the law is in the heart, and the heart is in the soul, and the soul is in the trust, and the trust is in God, the loving, the merciful, the caring, the good.” Dr. Ceric said he was happy to be in Seoul and proud to be part of the UPF conference.



Dr. Marco Frenchkowski, professor of New Testament Studies, University of Leipzig, Germany, reported on the huge numbers of refugees entering Germany, particularly from Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea. The unplanned and uncontrolled influx is causing tremendous social, economic and political problems, and also impacts the religious dialogue. The mix of faiths representing the different backgrounds, cultures and historical contexts is creating challenges but also opportunities for greater communication and awareness.

Dr. Frenchkowski is frequently asked by Koreans how Germany was able to unify during the time of the Cold War. He said, “It was due to the people’s bravery and resolve to seek freedom at all costs.” He explained the meaning of religious studies, which is the academic study of religious beliefs and institutions. The field helps people to understand religious beliefs, but it cannot change them. There can be no peace without accepting the ‘darker side’ of each religion, he said. He expressed his gratitude to UPF for the opportunity to meet so many interesting and diverse people from around the world.

Bishop David Alberto Frol, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Argentina, gave a heartfelt testimony about the importance of inner peace. Despite all the advances in modern science, and even if people have a good financial situation, without peace of mind there cannot be true happiness. Inner peace does not depend on external conditions or any scientific or technical progress; it comes from a relationship with God. Bishop Frol spoke about the moral duty that we each have to help those less fortunate. “We sin by omission if we give up our responsibility as children of God,” he said. He referred to a balance which is inherent in the human race. “It is not a simple task, but it is the basis for reaching a moral and spiritual awakening that is a driving force of a global transformation.”

He said that peace begins within each of us, and to this end, education and the life lessons learned in the home are critically important. The world today is filled with many negative influences. The family, which is the basis for society, is under attack. “The spiritual value of prayer, faith and hope are divine gifts. They are the foundation and purpose for the prosperous life in this world,” he said. The key concept emphasized by the bishop is interdependence. Interdependence requires a sense of responsibility at the individual as well as global levels. Peace has no value, he said, if others suffer from hunger, cold, pain or persecution. “Sustained peace lasts only where human rights are respected, where people are nurtured and where individuals and nations are free,” he said. We as members of God’s family face our greatest challenge by the sin of not doing what we should do.

Rev. Yoshinobu Miyake, chair, International Shinto Studies Association, Japan, praised the World Summit 2015 for including religious leaders. “It’s impossible to discover the best answer to the issues relevant to peace and development without considering the inner-being issue.” He pointed to the spiritual diversity of the panelists—Muslim, Christian, Shinto, Buddhism. The causes of war and conflict are

attributed to political and economic turmoil, but Rev. Miyake said that religion is an important factor and shouldn't be undervalued. "Religion has a responsibility against the issues in society where they live," he said. Religion is part of all societies, and, whether a person is a soldier or a terrorist, or a believer or not, everyone is affected by religion. He gave the example in Lebanon that many Christian denominations, commencing with the Maronite Church, battled against Muslim schools. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Muslim Bosniaks, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats were engaged in battle, and in Sri Lanka, Buddhist Sinhalese and Hindu Tamil have been in conflict for many years.

Religious people must learn to accept diversity and religious pluralism. "We should not be afraid of it," he said. All beings exist in relation to others. For example, "No one (including the lion itself) knows if the lion is a big, fierce animal if only the lion exists in this world. By the existence of a small cat, we can say, 'The lion is a big, fierce animal.' Similarly, a man will not be called a father without having children. If he has no children, he is just a guy. In other words, a father can be a father by the existence of a son and/or daughter." Similarly, in politics, economics and religions, there is no place for "fundamentalism," "monopoly" or "extremism." The path to peace is for human beings to work together to create a world based on mutual responsibility and interdependence.



Judge Mohammad Abou Zeid, president, Islamic Sunni Courts, Lebanon, began his remarks with a quote from the Holy Quran: "He brought you forth from the earth and settled you therein" (Surah 11. Hud, Ayah 61), which means that humanity's mission is to "build his kingdom and put its riches to good use." This is the purpose of religion, he said. Judge Zeid condemned those who use religion as a pretext to justify acts of destruction. He spoke about the culture of pardon and a culture of revenge.

Wars are terrible and destructive, but what about "the fire raging in the hearts and minds of war victims who have lost a dear one or who have been physically (with a leg or hand amputated) or materially (with the loss of a home, job, etc.) harmed?" The judge raised the alarm, saying that in the postwar era people are standing at the crossroads between the road to revenge and the road to forgiveness and pardon. The choice made can lead to either a spiral of violence or to choose forgiveness and pardon, which is the path to healing, reunion and reconstruction. It is not an easy choice, he said, but it is the role of counselors, preachers and educators to highlight "the values of forgiveness, pardon and repaying evil with good." These are the teachings of all faith traditions. Judge Zeid said to pardon and forgive is the way to end the cycle of violence and the calamity of war and its effects.