

UPF International's Third Peace Talks Webinar Shifts Focus to Parliamentarians

William Selig
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UPF International, New York -- The third program of "Peace Talks," titled "The Role of Parliamentarians in Addressing the Coronavirus Crisis," May 1, 2020, had over 700 participants from 89 countries.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Thomas Walsh (chairman, Universal Peace Federation) provided background information about the webinar series. In previous programs, international experts discussed the role of faith-based leaders, religious organizations, and governance leaders in responding to the pandemic. This third webinar dealt with the role of parliamentarians, in particular, how parliamentarians and parliaments can improve their responsiveness and preparedness; what best practices should be proposed; and what the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP), a project of UPF, can do to help.



Hon. Dan Burton (international co-chair, IAPP; member of U.S. Congress, 1983–2013), pointed out that we are no longer in the situation where one nation's parliament can deal by itself with a crisis that doesn't respect borders; rather, there must be open communication and cooperation as quickly as possible. He expressed appreciation for the work of UPF and this webinar: "We need to put our heads together and make plans so the message gets out as soon as possible." Congressman Burton said IAPP is preparing a resolution soon to be distributed through the UPF network and hopefully be passed by as many as the world's parliaments as possible. The purpose is to put into a place a mechanism so that if such a pandemic ever happens again, then governments can be quickly mobilized and the health hazard be contained and

defeated before it spreads out of control.

Dr. Michael W. Jenkins (president, UPF International), said IAPP webinars are being discussed and planned so that all parliaments can be informed and be involved. He praised the IAPP international co-chairs, Congressman Burton and Speaker de Venecia, for their leadership. "It's critical the parliaments work together, since the parliaments are the voice of the people." Dr. Jenkins hopes the special resolution will be disseminated and passed by the parliaments quickly. He described the resolution as a special communication system or early alert system so if a virus breaks out in one country, an alert would be sent immediately to the world's parliaments. A "needs assessment" will also be part of the IAPP resolution and be a global project of the associations under UPF International (IAED, IAPP). In explaining the needs assessment, Dr. Jenkins gave the example that if one nation has a surplus of personal protective equipment (PPE), then the equipment can be shared with a nation that reports a shortage.



Hon. Jose De Venecia, Jr. (international co-chair, IAPP; five-time speaker, House of Representatives of the Philippines, 1992–1998 and 2001–2008), expressed gratitude and relief that the UPF is taking the initiative to bring together expert presenters from around the world to contribute their advice, experience and best practices on dealing with this epidemic. "I'm 83 years old. I've never seen anything like this before." These webinars and grassroots programs are essential in the fight against this horrendous crisis, he said. Besides the terrible loss of life, there are broad social and economic implications. In the Philippines, Speaker de Venecia reported that there are about 9,000 cases of the disease and more than 500 deaths, so it is imperative that UPF and other organizations organize these kinds of programs so experiences can be shared and the world's parliaments be encouraged to work together more closely.



H.E. Albin Kurti (fourth prime minister [interim], Kosovo), said that despite the world's uncertainty,

"there is good news. The virus is a reminder that we must take care of one another and our planet." Prime Minister Kurti said that there are 800 infections in Kosovo; 270 have recovered, and 22 died. The reason for the lower numbers compared to other European countries is due to the quick response from the government and the constant revisiting of the situation. H.E. Kurti, elected prime minister in early February 2020, vows to take care of the people. "This virus does not discriminate against someone because they are rich or poor or different in any way, so we, as politicians, should not discriminate. It is our responsibility to help all the citizens." He said, as government officials and parliamentarians, we are now "living in a time of democracy and science. We must listen to the scientist and economists and then make the best decisions." He thanked the EU, the US and the Kosovar diaspora for their support. He quoted UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who described the pandemic as a human rights crisis.



Hon. María Fernanda Flores de Alemán (assemblywoman, National Assembly, Nicaragua; former first lady, Nicaragua), described the situation in Nicaragua. The current government has downplayed the seriousness of the virus. Schools, businesses and the government remain open. Assemblywoman Flores de Alemán said many of the citizens try to maintain social distancing, self-quarantine and other guidelines, but it is difficult in the face of the government's official inaction. The former first lady said her party, which is an opposition party, has introduced two bills to help the people. She points out the difficulties for a family to follow a stay-at-home order yet still be responsible to pay the rent and put food on the table.



Hon. Jong Seong Lim (co-chair, IAPP Korea; Democratic Party's deputy representative, National Assembly, Korea), said that South Korea is drawing attention from around the world for its strategy in getting the epidemic under control and as a model to emulate. South Korea, he said, learned its successful Covid-19 strategy from MERS, a previous coronavirus outbreak. Lessons include taking quick and

decisive action, preparing hospitals with trained personnel and equipment, avoiding overcrowding, and maintaining transparency. Most especially, stressed the congressman, is the crucial importance of testing. Korea quickly developed diagnostic tests and now ships these kits around the world. He also said that retired doctors and nurses are volunteering to work in the hospitals, and citizen groups are making masks for free distribution throughout the country.



Baroness Sandip Verma (member, House of Lords, United Kingdom), said we should learn from the experience of dealing with other highly contagious viruses -- Zika, Ebola, SARS and MERS. Inter-parliamentary communication and dialogue are essential, the baroness said, to share ideas and good practices. She described this crisis as an opportunity to recognize our shared humanity and for parliamentarians all over the world to come together. She expressed a particular concern for the situation of women and girls. There is a rise in domestic violence, increased stress due to economic insecurity, and unsafe conditions due to the extended quarantine. The baroness hopes the work of UPF and the webinars will continue and that the resolution will be quickly accepted.



Two other speakers were scheduled but unfortunately were not able to join the webinar. Sen. Khoabane Solomon Theko, chief whip, Senate of Lesotho and chief liaison officer to H.M. King Letsie III, experienced technical difficulties but expressed strong support for UPF and the IAPP initiative. Hon. Bhubaneswar Kalita, member of Parliament, India, and chair, IAPP South Asia, had a schedule conflict.

For the entire presentations and QandA session, please watch the webinar at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2Dx3WBVxpE

Link to the Audio: soundcloud.com/upfpeacetalks/peacetalks3-topic

The next webinar is scheduled for May 8. Details will be announced.

