

## UPF and WFWP France's Day of Peace Brotherhood and Religion, Paris

Brigitte Wada  
September 17, 2016



On September 17, 2016, on the occasion of the International Day of Peace, the French chapters of UPF and WFWP organized an interreligious Forum on the theme of “Brotherhood and Religion” at the Catholic center “Accueil Barouillère” in Paris.

Since early 2015, France has gone through a traumatic experience with terrorism. The recent killings on the Nice seafront and the beheading of the catholic priest Father Hamel while saying mass in his church in Normandy have heightened tensions and fears within communities.

The forum raised the fundamental question: can we go beyond simple tolerance and coexistence and live as brothers and sisters in a multicultural, multireligious society? Religions provide an answer from the core of their teaching: living as brothers and sisters is possible when one connects with the transcendental Spirit that is the source of compassion, mercy and love. The event, the second of three forums in 2016 in Paris\*, was also aimed at addressing contemporary social issues through the prism of the family and bringing the family to the fore of interreligious dialogue and harmony.

In the first session, moderated by UPF France vice president Patrick Jouan, the first speaker was a Catholic Bishop, Monseigneur Jacques Gaillot, Bishop of Partenia. In a soft but captivating tone, he conquered the audience speaking on the meaning of brotherhood, referring to a world under a warm sunshine or a beautiful garden with various kinds of fragrant flowers, adding: “What transcends us is what brings us together”. He then shared how current acts of terrorism could raise fear and intolerance even among religious and devoted people, in contradiction with their faith, and how he was working to ease the suffering of those who are rejected in society.

Jacques Marion, UPF France president, gave a brief report on the recently inaugurated International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace in London. He then outlined the UPF vision that religious leaders have the responsibility to unite and become the voice of conscience for society, helping to realize “one family under God” beyond borders. To bring this about, he said, there are three points which religions need to focus on: promoting a culture of heart and altruism; teaching the principles of family life; and clarifying the reality of the spirit world and the cause-effect relationship between life on earth and life after death.

After some debate with the audience, the moderator introduced Mrs. Patricia Earle, president of the Women’s Federation for World Peace in Birmingham, United Kingdom, who had come to Paris for the day to give her testimony to the meeting. After 20 years of dedicated outreach to women of all faith and cultures in multicultural Birmingham, from her own home, Mrs. Earle and a group of women activists have built a vibrant interfaith, intercultural community holding regular meetings and dialogues, developing character education programs, and supporting an orphanage in India which they founded. Patricia’s testimony touched the heart of all participants; she did not have enough words nor time to describe all her activities, but she conveyed her heart and dedication, attracting everyone’s respect.

The second session was moderated by Mrs. Brigitte Wada, WFWP France president. The first speaker was Cheikh Abdelkader Achour, imam of the Omar Mosque in Paris’ 11th district, one that was particularly affected by last November’s terrorist acts. Cheikh Achour talked about Islam and

brotherhood, referring to the Coran and to Prophet Muhammad's life experiences. Wisely avoiding to comment on political issues, he drew attention on core Islamic teachings, and particularly on the peacebuilding attitude and reactions of the Prophet in the face of persecution. Responding to questions from the audience, he pointed to the fact that the current spirit of killing in the name of Islam, including in recent cases of aggression against the Ahmadiyya community, was the same spirit behind the attack of many Muslim sites and people around the world and did not reflect the Prophet's heart and teaching.



The second part of the session was devoted to the perspectives of young people regarding brotherhood in these troubled times. It began with two songs on God's love and mercy sung by a young couple, Nicolas and Gaelle Tacher-Metifeu. Then Alexandre Huard, an executive member of UPF, spoke on the UPF Founder's vision concerning the development of heart from child to brother or sister, to husband or wife and finally to parent. A young father himself, expecting the birth of a second child, he talked from personal life experience about the process of heart education that is the foundation for brotherhood. Two young couples and a young Syrian Christian, who had attended World Youth Day 2016 in Cracovia with Pope Francis (at the same times that Father Hamel was killed in Normandy), concluded the day by sharing their experience of mingling with millions of youth from around the world. Nicolas and Gaelle, who had attended previous World Youth Days, praised the hospitality of Polish people and the fact that youth from all religions has been invited this time. Gaelle asked Imam Achour if they could organize a similar event, though on a smaller scale, with Christian and Muslim Youth in France. Sun Ming and Sophie Barje-Barrios expressed their amazement at the spirit of brotherhood and trust they could feel, under rough living conditions, with millions of unknown young people who shared similar values. Particularly, Sophie noted the vibrant spirit of young Catholics from France she had met, and reflected that Catholicism was probably not on the decline as people conventionally say.

The last speaker, a young Christian Syrian named Sharbel Al Hosh, who came to Europe as a refugee only a year and a half ago, expressed his gratitude for the spirit of communion he experienced in the World Youth Day. Then, from his own suffering life experience, he told the audience that they should not be confused by politicians' reports on the conflict in the Middle East, and really come to understand the heart of the people there striving for peace. At the end of the program, people shared that they felt a benevolent spirit hovering over the meeting.

\*The September 17 Forum was the second in a series of three programs planned in Paris in 2016 to discuss contemporary social issues through the prism of the family. Drawing from the wealth of their founders' tradition on the issue of the family, religious leaders are called to inspire young people to inherit that wisdom and build a world beyond the national, political and religious barriers of the past. A first forum on May 14 dealt with the parent-child relationship and the question of inheritance; after the September 17 event on brotherhood and sisterhood in a multicultural society, the third forum will raise the issue of conjugal love and gender equality. Further programs developing these issues will be held in the coming years.

Reported by Brigitte Wada  
WFWP France President