

Interfaith Forum Seeks Common Ground

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Sydney, Australia—A small but select number of faith leaders were invited to an interfaith forum that sought to build on the successes of an earlier forum.

The meeting, which took place on February 17, 2015, was a follow-up to an interfaith conference held in Sydney on November 11, 2014, under the title “Religions as Peace Builders.” In the November meeting, speakers from six faith traditions addressed the question “How can my religion do more to help prevent or resolve conflict and promote reconciliation and peace at the local, national and global levels?”



After discussion with one of the speakers, Rabbi Dr. Shimon Cowen, it was decided to follow up with this interfaith forum. At the November 11 conference there had been a strong concern, especially among the Muslim participants, to clarify the position of Islam regarding such issues as the emergence of the rebel group Islamic State and extremism in different parts of the world.

It was felt that one good way forward would be to find common ground, for example regarding the seven Noahide Laws. It was hoped that some good material from our presentations and discussions later could be disseminated with a view to progressing toward peace and understanding. UPF-Australia is very grateful to Rabbi Cowen for his concern and considerable investment to help organize this forum in partnership with UPF.

An interesting feature of the forum was that it was closed. It was felt that for the speakers to be free to speak their minds without fear of any repercussions, it was best not to invite a broad audience.

A small but select number of speakers were chosen, including Associate Professor Mohamad Abdalla, founding director of the Griffith University Islamic Research Unit; Father Dr. Patrick McInerney, Catholic priest and director of the Columban Mission Institute and coordinator of its Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations; Rabbi Dr. Shimon Cowen, founding director of the Institute for Judaism and Civilization, and Sheik Dr. Moustafa Rashed, former professor of Sharia law at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

The presentations were excellent, and much good material was gathered. UPF is looking forward to publishing the results and to making a significant contribution to addressing the extremism and terrorism that are so prevalent in the world today.