

UPF Copenhagen, Denmark's International Day of Human Fraternity 2023

Karsten Nielsen
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Copenhagen, Denmark - "Brotherhood Between Religions" was the theme of UPF's celebration of both World Interfaith Harmony Week and International Day of Human Fraternity.

The event was held on February 4, 2023, in the parish hall of Nathanael's Church (Church of Denmark). The audience of 40 comprised religious leaders, Ambassadors for Peace, local UPF supporters, and other guests.



In his welcoming remarks UPF-Denmark Secretary General Karsten Nielsen introduced International Day of Human Fraternity, which was established by the United Nations in 2020. Observed on February 4, it falls in the middle of World Interfaith Harmony Week - the first week of February.

World Interfaith Harmony Week, established by the United Nations in 2010, is based on "A Common Word Initiative," written by Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan with the idea that humanity is bound together by the two shared commandments of "Love of God and Love of the Neighbor."



The moderator of the UPF event was Zoraiz Khushdil, a leader of Minhaj-ul-Quran International and an Ambassador for Peace who has participated in UPF activities for more than 10 years. He praised UPF's initiatives and events as an example to follow and then led the celebration with much warmth, joy, and humor.

The first speaker was Maria Benedikte Fihl, a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Before becoming a church minister three years ago, she worked for 20 years as a diplomat involved in peacebuilding in Ukraine, Georgia, and the Balkan Peninsula.

Our world and society are filled with conflicts, she said, but that energy also can initiate something good. As a diplomat, she administered astronomical sums of money for the European Union, but said one cannot make a new pact with money. People's hearts need to awaken to the longing for God, a longing for love, for harmony and for the good. We need to rewrite people's hearts for the good. Referring to 1 Corinthians Chapter 12, she said we are nothing without each other. God is ambitious for all of us, she said, and one day all of us will sit around the same communion table.

Pastor Wieslaw Podlach from Sankt Annae, the local Catholic church, said that faith brings different nationalities together. To create true brotherhood, he said, we need something divine, God as our Father. Even people with no faith still have an original nature longing for love and the good. Jesus taught us by his example how to love all people, washing the feet of sinners and outcasts.

Next, UPF-Denmark supporter Elizabeth Bramsen played the piano and sang the Nina Simone song "Feeling Good."

The third speaker was Imam Basri Kurtis from the Albanian faith community in Denmark. At the age of 16 he traveled to Albania to attend high school, went on to study religion and Islamic Studies at Al-Azhar University in Cairo to find out what he wanted to do with his life, before he got a degree in pastoral care at Copenhagen University.

He found something universal in all religions, he said. The Divine makes us brothers and sisters. Taking care of one person has same meaning as taking care of all humankind.

Emphasizing the importance of International Day of Human Fraternity, he read part of the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, which was co-authored by His Holiness Pope Francis and His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmed El Tayeb. The document is a model for interfaith harmony and human solidarity, Basri Kurtis said. Let us all take inspiration and renew our commitment to stand together as one human family.

Referring to the teachings of the UPF co-founders, UPF-Denmark Co-Chair Dr. Thorkil Christensen said: "The dream is also a kingdom of true love, Cheon Il Guk: 'the land where two become one.'



"It is clear to us that this can be achieved only with God in His proper role, as a Parent in the midst of His children," Dr. Christensen said. "It is not only we who need God - God also needs us to realize His kingdom. In this light, it makes particularly good sense to talk about 'Brotherhood Between Religions.' We are very different and have cultivated different paths that prepare us to form this kingdom, which is to be realized both in this world and in the afterlife."

Dr. Christensen then led the Peace Ceremony, which consisted of music, religions and water - all of which go beyond nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, etc. Water cleanses our soul and body, gives life and connects all people. As the Prelude to Richard Wagner's opera Lohengrin was played, six religious leaders each prayerfully poured a glass of water into a common bowl.

After the ceremony, Shohreh Shahrzad, an Iranian multi-artist, played the daf, an Iranian frame drum. The instrument has been used in Iran for millennia in both folk and religious music.

Monika Fossing, a singer who is well known from appearing on a Danish TV talent show, sang "Amazing Grace" before being joined by famous jazz singer Metta Carter to sing a powerful medley of gospel songs.

At the end of the program, all the participants enjoyed soup, coffee and cake in a warm, brotherly atmosphere.