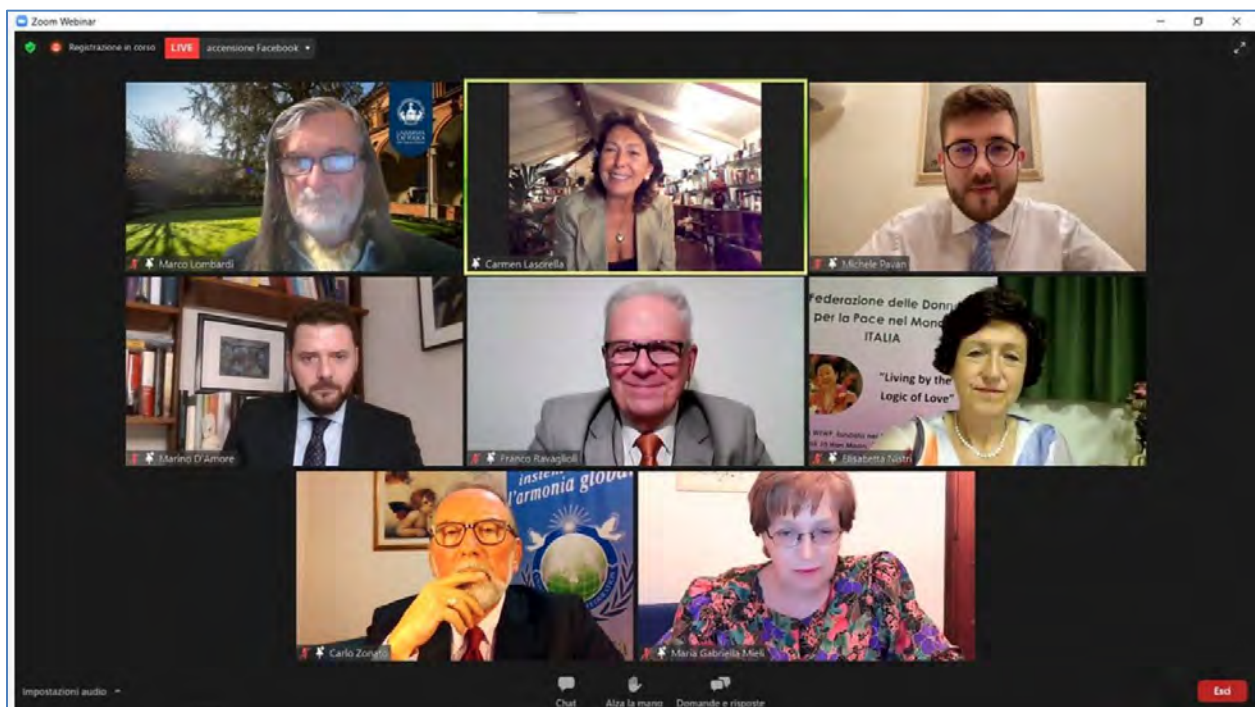


UPF Rome, Italy co-sponsored: Finding new perspectives for peace in Asia

Franco Ravaglioli
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Rome, Italy -- Finding new perspectives for peace in Asia was the focus of a roundtable co-sponsored by UPF.

"The Ways of Peace to Overcome and Resolve Emerging Asian Conflicts" took place online on September 24, 2021, in commemoration of the International Day of Peace established by the United Nations.

The roundtable was organized jointly by the Italian chapters of UPF and its International Media Association for Peace (IMAP) and International Association of Academics for Peace (IAAP), together with Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), an affiliated organization, and the independent newspaper *Eco dai Palazzi*.

Franco Ravaglioli, the secretary general of UPF-Italy, opened the discussion with the famous quote of Mother Teresa of Calcutta: "What is the worst defeat? Discouragement!"

Reflecting on this famous phrase, Mr. Ravaglioli said, "Despite the tragedies of the present time -- albeit with a heart swollen with pain -- we need to continue to believe that these storms are opportunities for change -- in the knowledge that we can live or die for something greater: peace."

He recalled the most important initiatives of UPF: World Summit 2020, attended by 6,000 delegates from 170 countries; the International Leadership Conferences (ILC); the Rally of Hope, now in its seventh edition; and Think Tank 2022, a global and multi-sectoral network of over 2,000 experts from different disciplines, committed to finding solutions to the most complex problems of our time.

Elisabetta Nistri, president of WFWP-Italy, said, "Afghanistan has no future if the rights of women, children and girls are not respected." Women play a crucial role as leaders in their communities, mothers in their families, and members of their societies and nations, she said. They therefore are vital to the stabilization and prosperity of any society. In order for women to make their contribution, it is absolutely necessary that their rights and dignity be respected. "This is the nine-point appeal that WFWP's Vienna-based office at the UN has made to the UN Human Rights Council and its Special Session on Afghanistan," she concluded.

The journalist **Carmen Lasorella** served as the moderator. She said: "Peace is a universal theme and value, a combination of good governance, justice, security and well-being. A universal notion, but one that is inevitably relativized by war, which continues to be a reality of our time. And it is precisely in order to prevent conflicts that it is necessary to know the element of war."

Asia, with its potential for conflict and the reality of the Pacific Ocean, concerns us all, she said. "Because it is there that the center of what must be the future balances has moved, because it is in that area that the assets have changed with players that have grown in the meantime. I'm thinking of the global weight of China and the geopolitical consequences of the conflict in Afghanistan, with its repercussions that also will affect our lives as Europeans."

Sen. Pier Ferdinando Casini, the honorary president of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), said,

referring to Europe, "The problems of globalization and international events show that it is not enough to be economic giants if you cannot have a political heart."

He referred to "problems that cannot be seen," such as the construction by the Chinese of fortified military islets to lay the foundations for a de facto sovereignty in the South China Sea, as well as the latent problems of Taiwan and Hong Kong. He spoke of the necessity to "build solid paths of peace starting from this Asian reality that today is a ground of global competition."

Speaking about Afghanistan, Senator Casini said that although he never believed in exporting democracy, there are rights that must be safeguarded at any latitude in the world. In order to have peace, he said, it is essential to rediscover the role of parliament, where all political forces identify themselves. Peace is a continuous reconquest and must be the primary objective of parliaments, he said. "What I want to assure UPF is that a network of parliamentarians exists and is ready to support your efforts and be a sounding board within parliaments," he said.

Professor Michele Pavan, the president of the non-profit organization Mondo Internazionale, said: "Achieving a peace of connectedness, of constant dialogue, of interaction between different cultures, is work that will require -- in addition to simply economic and security activity including military, which are fundamental to peace -- a context of cultural diplomacy. This soft-power practice encompasses all aspects of connection and knowledge of other cultures, acceptance and appreciation of diversity in the international arena, an economic and value exchange, a religious exchange and acceptance of religions globally."

He stated, "If democracy is not exportable, there are state contexts that can be more easily exported, such as probably that of the federal state."

Professor Marino D'Amore, a sociologist of communication of the Niccolò Cusano University of Rome, said: "We reason by logics of proximity. We feel a greater solidarity when we feel more implicated with respect to an affair. This implication comes from a proximity that is not necessarily geographical but cultural." The scholar then argued, "The coup in Myanmar did not elicit the same narrative and perception that the Taliban's seizure of Kabul did."

Professor D'Amore explained that, as Westerners, we felt more involved in that context, where an attempt was made to install a democratic government in a historical and cultural area that is unable to metabolize it. "The solution is in 'glocalization,' that is declining according to the socio-cultural contexts all those trends and democratizing ambitions, in a never unilateral and always intercultural perspective," he said.

Professor Marco Lombardi, the director of the Department of Sociology of the Catholic University of Milan, said: "We, as the Catholic University, have been in Afghanistan for many years. Among the many things we have done, we have organized training courses for women to become journalists. Women are always the engine of change; they have a vision of the future that passes through their sons and daughters. The future is changing with them. If then, as we did, from 2009 to 2015 we made a few dozen girls become journalists, then it's even more disruptive."

He explained that this has become a problem and that more than a hundred of these young women are staying in various "safe houses" between the cities of Kabul and Herat. Although flights have resumed, it is unimaginable that a young woman, because she is a journalist, could go to the Taliban government and get a passport to expatriate. "The only hope is to be able to work on humanitarian corridors with charter flights that do not require formal documents for boarding," he said.

The moderator, Ms. Lasorella, engaged the speakers in further discussion, inviting Professor Lombardi to speak about the narrative of terrorism and the possible alliance between West and East to defeat this common enemy. The professor said that the "responsibility of the media apparatus in the war on terrorism has been terrifying; it has acted as an amplifier to the proclamations of Islamist terrorism." He said he was skeptical that this threat could become a common enemy.

Asked if there is energy, strength and if we can count on young people to build peace, Professor Pavan said that the younger generations are well disposed and have strength and energy, which should not be marginalized and underestimated, because they could be a very important push to stem very dangerous contexts.

Professor D'Amore, asked by the moderator about information, answered that it does not always make education, but it contributes to it. Thanks to the comparison that new technologies offer us compared to the past, and through the selection of content, we can try to grasp a new socialization, he said. "With it the old agencies, such as the family and religion, must necessarily come to terms in order not to fall into obsolescence. They must also avoid situations of conflict with the new agencies and act in a spirit of collaboration and synergy."

Ms. Lasorella closed the meeting with a quote from St. Augustine: "There are no good or bad times, because the times are us," adding that the possibility of contributing to the roads to peace is also in our hands.