

UPF Italy's Online Commemoration Of The UN World Interfaith Harmony Week

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Rome, Italy -- An audience of over 100 participated in an online commemoration of World Interfaith Harmony Week.

The webinar titled "Can Peace Be Achieved by Human Effort Alone? The Role of Faiths toward True Human Brotherhood" was held on February 21, 2022, by the Italian chapters of UPF and its Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD).

The event also celebrated the United Nations' International Day of Human Fraternity. It was live-streamed on UPF-Italy's Facebook page.

Michele Cavallotto, coordinator of IAPD-Italy, opened the webinar by saying: "The world is going through a period with many conflicts, in which personal, economic and political gain often predominate. For this reason, the religions must intensify collaboration among themselves, promote spirituality and brotherhood, and cooperate with the governments, the institutions and the civil society, in order to build peace. My hope is that today's meeting can contribute to the realization of these important goals."

After a presentation of the music video of World Interfaith Harmony Week anthem "The Gift of Love," the moderator, **Maria Gabriella Mieli**, the coordinator of UPF for Southern Europe, read the message of **Barbara Aiello**, the founder of the Progressive Jewish Pluralist Movement. The rabbi recounted her experience in Serrastretta, a town in the province of Catanzaro. "With the parish priest Don Iuliano, we are committed to fostering dialogue between the Catholic community, the Jewish community and the people who consider themselves secular," Rabbi Aiello wrote.

The first initiative undertaken, she explained, "was to study the respective faiths, both in the church and in the synagogue. Attendance at services, holidays and events of the two traditions followed."

The rabbi continued: "Particularly significant moments were when the parish priest participated for the first time in the ceremony -- officiated in the synagogue -- in which a Jewish baby received a Jewish name on the eighth day after his birth, and when I was invited to read some passages from the Prophets in Hebrew during the Mass."

She ended by recalling the assertion of Pope John Paul II that Jews are the elder brothers of Christians and quoted Ingrid Mattson, a scholar of Islam, who hopes that in the name of faith, Islamic and Jewish communities can develop respectful and constructive relations.

Nader Akkad, the imam of the Grand Mosque of Rome, said: "Islam is a religion that asks the faithful to lay their trust in God's will, in His blessing, but accompanying this faith with action. Our strengths, our actions, our intentions, if not accompanied with the will of God, will not lead to any result. Especially for a goal such as inner peace, and peace in the world."

True peace, he explained, can be achieved by the believer in remembrance of God in prayer, through a

serene heart, a fraternal spirit, and with a collective action for world peace. "On this day of human fraternity," the imam said, "let us try to work together, brothers and sisters of different faiths, and together with those who haven't yet embarked on a path of spirituality. Through collective action, asking the Lord for His blessing and help, we can achieve peace in our hearts and in the world."



Francesco Canale, the Evangelical pastor of Equippers Church, said: "Faith can teach us three fundamental actions for peacekeeping. It all starts with a relationship with God.

"The first action is 'working for peace.' All faiths teach us to do good, according to God's plan," he said. "One sins not only by doing evil with hatred and war, but also when one does not do the works of charity. The first thing faith teaches us is to be industrious, fleeing evil and working for good.

"The second action is 'to go in peace,' keeping our souls pacified, in communion with God. The third action is 'praying,' which teaches us to be one with Him and to grow His fruits in our lives: peace, joy, love, patience and kindness."

He concluded by saying that faith is essential because inner peace is contagious and influences the family, society and nation. It is vital for the world and for us to cling to our faith and relationship with God. This will guide us to "strive for peace," to "go in peace," and to "pray," he said.

Don Valentino Cottini, a Catholic professor of Islamic-Christian relations, said: "There are those who say it's the Lord who does everything and all you have to do is rely on Him and everything will work out. And there are those who say no, it's us who do things and it's useless to pray and just expect without taking action. This is the dilemma over all times."

He cited Psalm 127 -- "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain" -- and the words of Jesus -- "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." He recalled the Abu Dhabi agreement signed in 2019 by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, in which it is reiterated that all religions would never incite war. Invoking them as a pretext for violence is the result of false interpretations.

He stressed the "need to go back to the roots of Christianity, to the invisible God who sent His Son Jesus of Nazareth, to plant the seeds of peace. As the Abu Dhabi agreement says, faith leads the believer to see in others a brother to be supported and loved. This is the seed of peace that needs to be grown through human responsibility. For the rest, peace among peoples is nothing other than the growth that only God is capable of propitiating."

Miguel Perea, the bishop of the Anglican Episcopal Church of Europe, said, "The word 'effort' present in the [webinar] title reminded me of that passage in Luke's Gospel in which Jesus, having finished speaking to the crowd, told Peter to take off and cast his nets." Despite the unsuccessful fishing of the previous night, Peter, respecting Jesus' request, let down his nets. The nets filled up with an enormous quantity of fish so that he needed the help of another boat.

"The first point for reflection is that the uncertainties of our hearts and the voracity for power and wealth make us feel that we are in the darkness. This is what Peter is talking about, as he had labored all night," the bishop said.

"The second point concerns those who think they cannot achieve the goal of peace by their own efforts. They need to show trust, like Peter's in lowering the nets. The answer is the catching of an infinite number of fish.

"If you and I cast the nets from our boat, of whatever faith, if we work together for peace and harmony, the results will be so great that we will need the help of the other boat."



Tenzin Khentse, a Tibetan Buddhist monk, said: "My Master taught me that if there is faith, everything is possible. If there isn't faith, the world becomes a really difficult place." He explained that having faith means opening our minds and hearts to let in a light and be blessed by the transcendent. We can call him Buddha, God or by different appellations, but it is something that surpasses your individuality, your separating from the others, caring just for yourself and your own interest. The trust will allow you to embrace everything that exists as total perfection of which you can be a part.

"As the glow of lightning on a dark and cloudy night illuminates everything for a brief moment, so by the power of Buddha, for a short time and rarely, some virtuous thought appears," Tenzin Khentse said. We must be able to seize the opportunity to see that light and follow it without delay, whatever effort and commitment it takes, to embrace the world around us and to make peace sprout.

Sergio Coscia, director of the Turin chapter of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), an organization that is affiliated with UPF, said, "The desire for all of humanity to live as one big family belongs not only to people of faith, but to all human beings." He explained that it is natural for believers to speak about God according to their own spiritual tradition. "Today we are called to take our faith to an even greater level: God's willingness to enter into the lives of human beings is not connected to our religious affiliation," he said.

"We men and women of faith are called to be brothers and sisters of all humanity. And because of our spiritual journey we have the good fortune to feel the loving presence of our Creator and to recognize ourselves as brothers and sisters. God loves us like a parent and desires that we care for one another with the same unconditional love that He has for us. This is the spirit that can lead to true peace."

At the conclusion of the meeting Gabriella Mieli, the moderator, quoted U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres, "Let us commit ourselves to do more to promote tolerance, reciprocal comprehension, and cultural and religious dialogue."

Carlo Zonato, the president of UPF-Italy, concluded the webinar by reading a quote from Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon: "The most important wisdom humanity needs is knowing the heart of God and His ideal. For this reason, the role of religion continues to be of fundamental importance."