

## **Interfaith Conference on Religions as Peacebuilders**

In Soung Kwun  
November 11, 2014

Sydney, Australia - UPF-Australia held an interfaith conference entitled “Religions as Peace Builders” at the Oceania Peace Embassy in Sydney Nov. 11, 2014.

This event was co-sponsored by the Human Rights Global Conscience Incorporated, which is headed by an Ambassador for Peace. More than 90 participants and staff, including religious, society and media leaders, attended the conference.

The event opened with a musical offering by Korean and Japanese volunteers dressed in their beautiful national costumes, which set a great atmosphere for the day. This was followed by welcoming remarks from UPF-Oceania Chairman Rev. In Soung Kwun. Rev. Greg Stone, the UPF-Australia president, then gave an overall perspective of the meaning and purpose of the event, emphasizing the principles of peace and interfaith that UPF promotes. A UPF introductory video was also shown to the audience.

Over the following three sessions, six religious leaders addressed the topic of “How my religion can do more to help prevent or resolve conflict and promote reconciliation and peace at the local, national and global levels.” The first two speakers, chosen in alphabetical order according to the name of their religion, were the Buddhist Dr. Venerable U Dhammacara and the Christian speaker Rev. Dr. Patrick McNerney.

The first speaker emphasized the need of mindfulness and outlined a list of ethical approaches which will develop peace in our society. He used the example of business deals, which should be formed as a “win-win” situation for all parties.

Dr. McNerney stressed the need of a “new” Christian approach rather than doing more of the same. He re-interpreted the meaning of the Trinity and other concepts that are usually associated with Christianity and described their relevance to other faith traditions.

In the next session, Mr. Sharat Arora, who represented Hinduism, spoke of the universality and tolerance of the teachings, and the speaker for Islam and co-sponsor of the conference, Sheikh Dr. Mostafa Rashed, advocated his vision of a more just society based on education, respect and tolerance. He suggested setting up sub-committees to deal with different areas of concern.

After the lunch break, Rabbi Shimon Cowen, director of the Institute for Judaism and Civilization, explained the root of the major civilizations based on the seven Noahide Laws, which are universal and common to all. He especially stressed the need for political change in Australia. The last primary speaker was Rishama Salah Chohili representing Mandaism.

After all the religious leaders presented their views and interacted with the audience in question and answer sessions, UPF presented some of their on-the-ground activities that promote interfaith in the final session. Ken Schmittat introduced the Religious Youth Service and plans for an upcoming project early next year in Sydney, and Natascha Schellen shared the UPF vision for soccer and peace, reporting about the recent Soccer for Peace tournament organized by UPF Australia. The final speaker was John Bellavance, president of UPF in the state of Victoria, who argued for the idea of an interfaith council and the positive impact that people of faith could and should have on their society.

With the conference resolution and reflection at the end, there was a feeling that the time for change had come, and that religious people have the means to work together and turn the tide of extremism that is now facing the world.