

The Southeast Europe Peace Summit was successfully held in Tirana, Albania

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The Southeast Europe Peace Summit was successfully held in Tirana on October 25-28, 2019. The two-day Peace Summit featured a wide range of activities attended by participants from over 50 nations.

Three main events were held at the large, 3000-seat Congress Hall of Tirana. On October 26 morning, the Summit's Opening Plenary was attended by the Founder of the Universal Peace Federation, the heads of state of North Macedonia and Kosovo, as well as ten former heads of state and government and key political figures from the Balkans region. In the afternoon, the Youth and Students for Peace Rally gathered over 2000 young participants centering on cultural performances and peace projects. On October 27 afternoon, the Summit concluded with a hall-packed Family Blessing Festival.



Groundbreaking Ceremony for the new Headquarters of UPF in the region

On October 27 morning, the Groundbreaking Ceremony for the new Headquarters of UPF in the region was held in the presence of the Deputy Mayor of Tirana.⁷

Over 70 current and former parliamentarians and government ministers attended the event, including Deputy Prime Minister Enver Hoxhaj from Kosovo, ministers Skender Reçica from Kosovo and May Chidiac from Lebanon.

The Albanian religious community was represented by the leader of the Islamic community Mr. Bujar Spajiu, the World Leader of the Bektashi Order Father Edmond Brahimaj, the Albanian Evangelical Alliance representative Mrs. Nikki Dorçi, as well as the Secretary General of the Interreligious Council of Albania Dr. Genti Kruja. Other religious figures came from throughout Europe and the Middle East. The African continent was represented by the Co-Chair of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development in Africa, Sheikh Mansour Diouf from Senegal.



15 major organizations were official partners to the Summit, including the Municipality of Tirana, the Podgorica Club of former heads of state and governments from the Balkans, the Ukraine Peace Council, the World Bektashi Order, the University of Tirana and other academic and business organizations. UPF affiliate organizations included the Washington Times Foundation, the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) and the Professors' World Peace Academy (PWPA).

The Summit's organizing committee was co-chaired by Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, UPF Europe and Middle East Chairman; H.E. Alfred Moisiu, former president of Albania (2002-2007); and Father Edmond Brahimaj, the world leader of the Bektashi Order.

The Peace Summit was significant for leaders in the Balkans. Current political conflicts in the region are intense, within nations like Albania, or between nations such as Kosovo and Serbia. Relations with the EU are at a point of tension: a few days before the event, Albania and North Macedonia were denied the long-expected agreement to begin the accession process into the EU, which created great political turmoil in the two countries. The issue was addressed by each of the key political figures who spoke at the Opening Plenary, drawing great attention from the media.



The Opening Plenary began with a panel on the theme "Perspectives for peace in the Balkans", moderated by Albanian Deputy Speaker Vasilika Hysi. The North Macedonian President of the National Assembly Talat Xhaferi initiated the session, followed by Hon. Albin Kurti, the recent election winner and future Prime Minister of Kosovo, and by Ambassador Christopher Hill, who served as US Ambassador in the Balkans during the 1990's and who was the main American diplomat in Albania at the end of the Communist era.

The launch of the International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP) began with a speech by H.E. Elisa Spiropali, the Albanian Minister of Relations with the Parliament, on behalf of Prime Minister Edi Rama under whose patronage the Summit was convened. She was followed by H.E. Stevo Pendarovski, President of North Macedonia and by H.E. Hashim Thaçi, President of Kosovo. Former Albanian President Alfred Moisiu gave his remarks as Co-Chair of the Summit before introducing the UPF Founder, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon.



Dr Moon said that she envisioned a bright future for Albania and for the Balkans. Pointing to the historical role of peninsulas as cradles of civilization, comparing the Balkans peninsula with the Korean peninsula, she expressed her conviction that Balkan nations had come to a time of opportunity. Instead of lamenting the rejection by the EU, she said, if Albania and Balkan nations focus on strengthening their base with strong families and spiritual values, they would become a transforming power for Europe. Quoting the Bible, she concluded that although Albania was considered last in Europe after a long history of suffering, time had come for the last to become the first, drawing great applause from the audience.

Eight former heads of state from nations that had been in conflict during the Balkans wars, came up on stage to receive an ISCP founding medal from Dr. Moon. They included President Mesić of Croatia (2000-2010); Prime Minister Muratović of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995); President Sejdu of Kosovo (2006-2010); Prime Minister Cvetković of Serbia (2008-2012); President Budimir of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (2011-2015); Acting President Jakup Krasniqi of Kosovo (2010-2011); Prime Minister Ahmeti of Albania (1991-1992); and Prime Minister Kosumi of Kosovo (2005-2006).

The signing of the ISCP Declaration was done at the luncheon that followed the Opening Plenary, chaired by President Alfred Moisiu and Dr Thomas Walsh, chairman of UPF International.

The following afternoon and next morning, ten Summit sessions were held at the Tirana International Hotel, well attended by around 400 participants. They dealt with six areas of focus recently launched by UPF: the Summit Council for heads of state (ISCP), the Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP), Religious Leaders (IAPD), the Media, the Academic world and Business. Other sessions addressed the themes of Migration, Education for peace, Interfaith activities and the Role of Women for peace and reconciliation.

A Global Women Peace Leadership Banquet for 150 participants was organized on October 26 evening by WFWP, while a dinner for Interfaith Leaders was hosted by Father Edmond Brahimaj.

Many participants testified to the quality of the panelists and the relevance of panel discussions. At the Closing Plenary, a full-room audience listened to insightful reflections on "Peace Perspectives in Southeast Europe" by two distinguished speakers: Austrian Minister of Defense Dr. Werner Fasslabend (1990-2000) and H.E. President Bujar Nishani of Albania (2012-2017). Dr. Michael Balcomb, head of FFWPU - Europe and Middle East, concluded by sharing about the UPF Founder's perspective for the development of ISCP in the Balkans and the greater region.

A high point of the Summit was the Family Blessing Festival held at the Tirana Congress Hall on October 27 afternoon. Representing the 6 regions of Albania and the 61 UPF Councils created since 2018 throughout the nation, 1200 Albanian couples participated in a marriage re-dedication ceremony officiated by Dr Hak Ja Han Moon, under the watch of a full audience and with live coverage by TV cameras.

Affirming the importance of the family as the cornerstone of a peaceful and stable society is at the core of UPF's vision and activities. This was also the message given as congratulatory remarks by Mrs. Monika Kryemadhi, the wife of Albanian President Ilir Meta, a well-known political figure and party leader in her own right.



After traditional dances and songs by young performers and famous Albanian singers, Dr Moon spoke again to the audience about the importance of strengthening the cohesion of society by promoting family values.

She then asked President Alfred Moisiu to lead the Steering Committee of the International Summit Council for Peace in the region, offering publicly her support for this initiative. She then offered a donation to three charities in Albania: the Sisters of Mother Teresa Foundation, a Children's Charity founded by former First Lady Mrs. Berisha, and the Bektashi Order represented by Father Edmond Brahimaj.

The Summit concluded with a closing dinner and a few reflections and songs from the audience. For many participants, this was a milestone event, where representatives from different faiths, political affiliations, nationalities, sometimes from enemy nations, came together centering on an inclusive vision for peace. Issues were raised that included political, economic, religious and social concerns, centering on the ideal that humankind should be one family, and that this ideal can grow and expand from the Balkans region.

