

Hard and Soft Roads to Peace Michael Balcomb January 29, 2012

UPF's latest international Leadership Conference, held in Korea over the Chinese New Year holidays, brought together just over 200 participants from 72 nations to consider possible roads to peace. There was a particular focus on peace and security issues related to Northeast Asia and the Korean peninsula.



UPF conference delegates at the interfaith opening plenary held in Seoul's modern Cheon Bok Goong sanctuary

In recent weeks, the area has been in a state of heightened alert following the sudden death of North Korea's long-time dictator, Kim Jong Il, and the accession of his little known youngest son, Kim Young-Un. Along with the displays of public grief by its citizens, North Korea conducted a variety of missile tests clearly staged to send a message south across the 38th parallel and further afield to Japan.

During the same time, the world's press drew attention to the launch of China's first aircraft carrier, the 67,000 ton *Varyag*. Despite the fact that the ship may be several years away from active service, the well publicized sea-trials sent ripples throughout the region and was seen by some as a response by China to US President Barack Obama's Pacific Rim tour to bolster the US's strategic alliances in Asia.

In several tightly debated sessions, experts from Russia, the United States, Japan and South Korea considered the implications of these developments and pondered the relative effectiveness of "hard power" options (political, military and economic) and "soft power" alternatives including citizen diplomacy, humanitarian, cultural and even religious and interfaith responses to conflict.



Toshio Miyatsuka

Kook Jin Moon

Asamblek Ashlakhonov

Alexandre Mansourov

Dr. Asamblek Ashlakhonov, Deputy Chairman of the International Relations Committee of the Senate of the Russian Federation, spoke on the growing role of Russia's foreign policy in the Pacific Rim and Northeast Asia, reminding the participants that two-thirds of Russia's territory is North East Asia.

Prospects for Change in Northeast Asia

Dr. Alexandre Mansourov, Visiting Scholar at the US-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins University predicted that a post-Kim Jong Il North Korea will become more dynamic, more pragmatic, and more nationalistic. Prof. Toshio Miyatsuka of Yamanashi Gakuin University Japan raised concerns about the persecution of religion in North Korea and lack of food and health care.



UPF Delegates in session



A question from Robert Van de Meulebroucke, Belgium

In his presentation “Strong Korea?” Dr. Kook Jin Moon, the fifth son of UPF Founders Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon, looked beyond Pyongyang to the broader challenges that the explosive growth of Chinese military and economic power could pose to South Korea and its democratic neighbors and allies. “Freedom is worth defending,” he said, “and the time has come when we cannot solely rely on the good will and assets of other nations – especially the United States – for our own security.”

Among those considering soft power options was Joyce Davies, long term foreign affairs correspondent for National Public Radio. Although a free press has been and always will be a necessary and influential part of peaceful democracies, she pointed to the fast-growing impact of “citizen journalism” and the ability of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to facilitate rapid social change, as shown during the “Arab Spring.”



Cindy Courville, USA

Ran Cohen, Israel

Mahendra Lama, India

Agustin Anaya, Nicaragua

Cindy Courville, the first US Ambassador to the African Union, reflected on some of the growing pains of these new democracies, noting the importance of respecting the will of the people even when elections bring to power parties with values that could be seen as threatening to Western interests, such as the recent ascendance of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. “The United States –and any nation – cannot pick sides,” she said. “That is and must be a matter for the people of each nation to decide.”

Echoing these sentiments, Ran Cohen, a former member of the Israeli Knesset, said that the best hope for peace for Israel and its neighbors was for ordinary Israelis and Palestinians to find a direct way to peace through a popular referendum, citing evidence that among both Israelis and Palestinians alike the two-state solution is affirmed by a majority of their citizens. Elected leaders, on the other hand, are dragging their feet.



Some of the faith leaders in the session celebrating the United Nations World Week of Interfaith Harmony

Another highlight of the conference was a celebration of the second United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week, observed around the first week of February each year. Meeting in the Cheon Bok Goong, a modern interfaith sanctuary, representative religious leaders from nine faiths – Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Shintoism, Sikhism, and Unificationism – offered prayers and lit candles in a spirit of reconciliation before moving outside to light lanterns to welcome in the Chinese Year of the Dragon.



Dr. Hyung Jin Moon at the New Year's lantern ceremony



Two Shinto representatives lighting the peace candles

Following the interfaith ceremony, Geetha Rajan, Trustee of UPF India, spoke of the need for UPF to expand its work in India, and Amb. Sam Zakhem of the USA echoed a similarly passionate call for UPF in the USA. UPF Chairman, Rev. Hyung Jin Moon, concluded the session with the keynote address calling on UPF Ambassadors for Peace and volunteers worldwide to expand their service to the world, building a global movement that addresses global problems and brings realistic solutions.



Sam Zakhem, USA



Geetha Rajan, India



UPF Chair Hyung Jin Moon



Kastriot Tusha, Albania

The UPF has long advocated a heightened role for religious and spiritual voices in the peace process. As long ago as 2000, Dr. Moon called for the creation of an Interfaith Council within the United Nations system. On the national level, UPF chapters have been active in creating or promoting national interfaith councils, and recently Thailand became the latest nation to inaugurate an interfaith council, with representatives of all of the nation's major faiths. As fate would have it, just weeks after the inauguration, the nation faced unprecedented flooding and UPF and Council volunteers went into action, bringing food, water and medical supplies to communities cut off by the rising waters.



UPF braves the cold to join more than 2000 people joined a New Year's parade through the streets of Seoul

The ILC participants also had the opportunity to join several festivities celebrating the “Year of the Dragon” as well as a banquet, entertainment and prayer ceremony at the Peace Palace high in the mountains above Seoul, and a downtown parade of friends and members of the wider Unification Movement in honor of the birthday celebrations of the UPF Founders, Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon, now 93 and 70, respectively



Ambassador Krishna Rajan offers birthday congratulations to Father and Mother Moon on behalf of the UPF and the ILC



A presentation of flowers to Father and Mother Moon from Senator and Mrs. Ashlakhonov.

“Father Moon’s simple but powerful message of boundless love and unconditional compassion, of service and sacrifice, of family values and spiritual leadership, is like a lighthouse which beckons the world,” said Ambassador Krishna Rajan of India in his congratulatory message. “His answer to conflict is the realization that we are one human family created by God. Living for the sake of others is the only road to real happiness.”