

International Day of Families - Vienna, Austria

Peter Haider - May 17, 2019



On the occasion of the “International Day of Families” the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), the **Women’s Federation for World Peace** and the Austrian Family Federation for World Peace organized on May 17th 2019 in Vienna a conference on the topic “**Family as the Basis of a Sustainable Future**”, which was attended by 50 guests.

In his introductory statement Mr. Peter Haider, President of UPF Austria, **spoke about UPF’s** view on the importance of families:

“The Universal Peace Federation affirms the value of the family as the core unit of society. The family has formed the basis for communities, societies and civilizations throughout the **ages. Virtually all the world’s religions teach the sacred value of marriage and family.** The family is the school of love. It is also the school of virtue, ethics and citizenship. By strengthening the family, we can build a stronger base of social capital that will enhance the overall quality of life for everyone. The natural family is grounded in marriage, the cornerstone of the family. Children benefit from having loving parents, a mother and father, who are committed to the well-being of their sons and daughters.”

UPF is an active supporter of various UN initiatives that support the family, including the International Day of Families and the Global Day of Parents. UPF also partners with NGOs and faith-based organizations that affirm the social significance of marriage, family and parenting.

All together there were eight speakers, each of them expressing their insights on the topic of the family.

Mr. Norbert Sieber, a member of the Austrian parliament from the Conservative Party, who heads the Family Committee, **explained the government’s efforts and measures in support of** the families during the past two years. They could achieve that the families have more support from the government side. He explained that the average household income has increased by 2,4%. Also, the government stopped to have a budget deficit, which increases the opportunities of future generations.

The second speaker, Dr. Elisabeth Preimesberger-Riehl, a young mother and medical doctor, spoke about what family means to her: a safe place for parents and children, a place of honesty and acceptance. It also means a lasting relationship, which young adults long for after having experienced single life. Before having children, Dr. Riehl did a course about **essentials of being a parent, a “Parents’ license”.** She learned about the importance of guiding the children through difficult phases and suffering as well as happy times.

Dr. Afsar Rathor, a former project manager in the UNIDO and other UN organizations from Pakistan, who grew up in Iran, studied in the United States and finally moved to Vienna working for the UN. In his talk he shared about his experiences of having lived in different countries and having seen tragedies in Ruanda, Bosnia etc. working for several organisations of the UN. Presently he is besides many other activities with NGOs and Universities also engaged in counselling couples, who are friends of his family or colleagues on the verge of divorce. And he was able to save many marriages already. He sees a main reason for marital problems in the lack of communication and in a lack of respect towards each other.

According to his experience, religion has to play an important role in conveying values to the

young generation, and marriage is a divine relationship in which both, man and woman, have equal responsibilities.

Dr. Sofija Bajektarevic, an Ethnomusicologist and designer born in former Yugoslavia, spoke about wedding customs and marriage in the Balkan area, on which she did her academic studies. She described the wedding as the richest and most essential ritual in human culture, through which the participants undergo a fundamental change in their social status. As a close of her presentation she sang a Bosnian wedding song for the audience.

Abdul Kadir Hamdan, Representative of the Permanent Mission of Eritrea to the UN in Vienna. He has lived in Germany for more than 40 years and is married to a German lady with a Catholic background for 43 years. Being a Moslem his education in a Catholic school in Eritrea helped him to be able to live together with people of other faiths or cultures. His wife has three **sisters who all got divorced. So his mother in law used to say: "The African is better than three Germans!"**. Mr. Hamdan was one of the **founders of the "Horn of Africa News Agency"**.

Mrs. Claudia Cordie, president of the Vienna Family Network reported about her association, which has by now 2500 members. They started as a group of foreign women in Austria who were at home looking after their children. Through the association they got connected to each other and they developed a network of support. The members are **mainly from the USA, Great Britain, but also from the Philippines, from African countries and other continents, reflecting the diversity of the international community in Vienna.**

Dr. Titus Leber, creator of numerous large scale interactive-cultural multimedia productions and a writer and director of several award-winning films.

He reported about a UPF seminar which he and his wife attended recently in Holland. He learned that Rev. Moon introduced the relationship patterns within the family as the healing principle for humankind, a principle which can be found in a similar way also in Daoism and Confucianism, for example in the Book of Changes. At the seminar he also got to understand the principle of restoring the conflict between Cain and Abel, which made him understand why UPF is striving for reconciliation between Christianity and Islam.

The contributions of all speakers were greatly appreciated by the participants.

In the second part of the program the participants participated in a **World Peace Blessing** conducted by Tony and Elisabeth Cook. A beautiful cultural program with the Gipsy Swing Band and a buffet with Korean food concluded the event.

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