

UPF Geneva, Switzerland's International Day of Families Interreligious Program

Heiner Handschin
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Geneva, Switzerland -- To commemorate the 25th anniversary of International Day of Families, the Universal Peace Federation, in joint sponsorship with the World Council of Churches (WCC), the UPF-affiliated organization Women's Federation for World Peace International (WFWPI), the Geneva Interfaith Intercultural Alliance (GIIA), and the Fribourg Peace Forum (FPF), convened a special one-day program of debate and discussion on the topic "Interreligious Cooperation for Peace and Human Development -- Creating an Environment for Thriving Families."

In this year's commemorative event, the organizers decided to focus on the special challenges that families face in an increasingly difficult environment caused by war and conflict, human trafficking and mass-migration, climate change as well as the scourge of widespread substance abuse by youth.

The conference, which was held in the WCC's Geneva Ecumenical Center on May 14, 2019, started with a high-level opening panel gathering the key organizers, the World Council of Churches and the Universal Peace Federation, but also the permanent representative of the Holy See mission to the UN in Geneva, as well as a representative of academia, the Fribourg Peace Forum.



Opening Panel

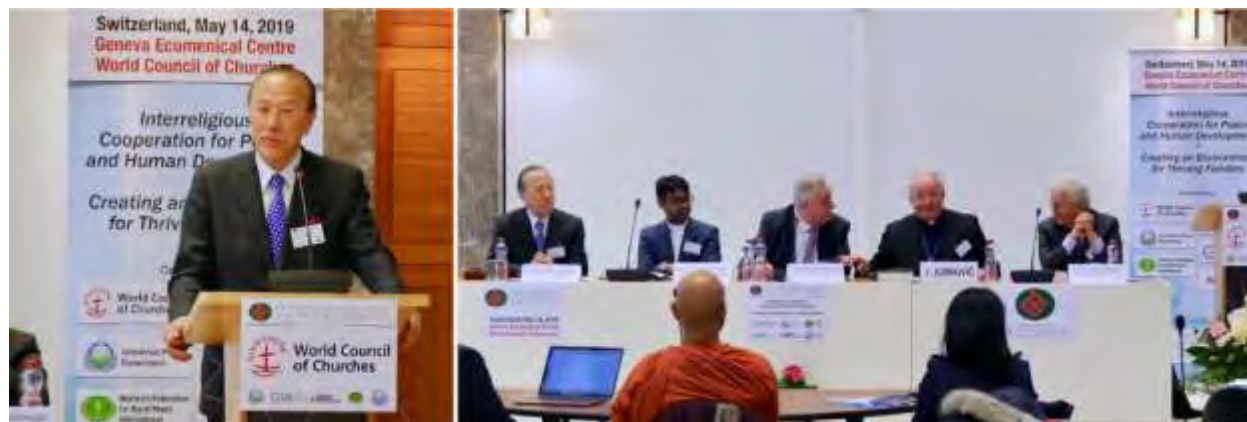
Mr. Heiner W. Handschin, director of the UPF liaison office, opened the session with welcoming remarks, explaining briefly the reason for this conference and the strong bond between faith and family. He introduced the first speaker, Rev. Dr. Peniel Rajkumar, executive director of the Interfaith Program of the World Council of Churches.

Dr. Rajkumar extended the warmest greetings of the general secretary of the WCC, Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, who wasn't able to join the event due to other engagements. Dr. Rajkumar highlighted the key role of families in educating children, with a particular focus on faith formation. Despite the flux of notion, this fact is self-evident, he said. He quoted Catholic theologian Peter C. Phan -- "To be religious in this time -- is to be interreligious!" -- emphasizing the importance of interreligious cooperation for solving problems and addressing urgent issues of the current time.

The next speaker, Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, regional president of UPF for Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East, emphasized that the family currently faces unprecedented challenges on a global scale. No single government can solve these troubling issues, and political solutions alone will not make a difference, he said. He stressed the need to include religious communities and faith-based organizations, like some of

the organizing partners, into the current efforts to solve some of the most serious issues.

He was followed by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovich, the head of the mission of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva, who pointed out the crucial importance of the family as the school of humanity and its essential function in society -- which was expressed in the statement of the recent Vatican Synod on the Family: "The family is the cell of human society and the primary place of education and a special formative environment for youth." He mentioned also that this year there are two important commemorations: first, the 25th anniversary of the International Year of the Family (declared by the United Nations in 1994); and second, the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (signed by the United Nations in 1989). He pointed out that the many challenges confronting the contemporary family make it very difficult to fulfill its crucial role toward society.



The desire to marry and create a family is still very vibrant in our society, the archbishop said, despite the creeping in of selfish individualism that increasingly is penetrating our contemporary world. It seems alarming that currently there is too little understanding of the importance of the family's role as the first classroom for people to learn to be human, he said. He therefore called for the defense of the family as a key factor for a sustainable civilization of human compassion and love.

Professor Dr. Adrian Holderegger, president of the Fribourg Peace Forum (FPF) and professor emeritus of moral theology at the University of Fribourg, offered an academic perspective on the role and function of the family and the current challenges with changing norms and values. He described the efforts of FPF to transcend social divisions and contribute to a global effort for the establishment of peace and respect for human rights and human dignity. If there is no understanding between religions, there won't be any understanding within societies, he said.

Professor Holderegger mentioned that political conflicts in most cases are connected to religious convictions, which on the one hand may contribute to appeasing conflicts but on the other hand may contribute to escalating conflicts. More than ever before, he said, there is a need for core values in today's society. The family as the sociologically defined key unit in our society is probably most affected by the presence of or lack of those fundamental core values, he said.

Session I: 13th Youth Interfaith Council Session: "What Can Families Contribute to Faith, Social Stability and Human Development?"

This session, organized by the Geneva Interfaith Intercultural Alliance (GIIA) was opened by the current president of the Youth Interfaith Council, Rabbi Kevin De-Carli of the Jewish community of Baden in Switzerland's Aargau canton. He welcomed the audience and the panelists and gave the floor to Mrs. Carolyn Handschin, the spokesperson of the Secretariat of the council.

Mrs. Handschin first read a short message of encouragement and support from the founding president of GIIA, H.E. Makarim Wibisono, the former ambassador of Indonesia to the UN in Geneva and former president of the General Assembly, the Human Rights Commission and holder of other high-ranking international positions. She then gave an overview of the past 12 years of activities and 10 Model UN Interfaith Youth Council sessions.

She also introduced the vision of UPF founders Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon for an interreligious council at the United Nations, as a possible upper house. Such a body could bring in core values and allow a faith-based approach to contribute constructively to solutions in current world affairs, she said.

Following this, the panelists were introduced and the topics of their debates announced. Rabbi De-Carli opened the official council session and presented the mandate of the interfaith youth delegates to the council members:

Youth representatives should argue for positive social outcomes rooted in the core family values of their traditions and their own life experiences. It was meant to build on the GIIA Model UN Youth Interfaith Council programs held over the last decade.

Then, as decided unanimously by the council members, Rabbi De-Carli, representing Judaism, was the first speaker of the panel. He painted vividly the image of his very diverse Jewish community in Baden, which was due to the influx from Jewish migrants from various parts of Europe and the world. Some Jewish members are even from Africa. In Judaism, the mother in the family plays a very crucial role, he said. In Jewish textbooks, one speaks of a marriage contract which is a catalogue of commitments that the husband has to make to his wife.



The Jewish community is very family-centered to the point that one can be a member only as a family, not as an individual, Rabbi De-Carli said. Between the individual and the government there is always the family. In light of that, there is very extensive care for widows, orphans and people without a direct family. They will be well taken care of as part of the extended family in the community, he said.

Ms. Atefeh Sadeghi, representing Islam, holds a master's degree in peace and conflict transformation. She has been putting her expertise in peacebuilding and mediation at the disposal of the EastWest Institute. She expressed that she would want to change the title of the session to: "What can faith contribute to family and human development?"

Family is uniting voices together, allowing the individual to feel safe, stable and secure, Ms. Sadeghi said. The multilateral structure of the family currently has been interrupted. In a world where faith often is misused for political purposes, it is important to start from the basics. For her, faith helps her to keep a strong connection to higher core values that are necessary to live together with our neighbors. She called out to all to take faith as an element that unites families, so that the individual can grow and develop. We should speak together in ways that unite us and not that separate us!

Mr. Olivier Gravrand, representing Unificationism, is an engineer who works in Geneva. He introduced the three basic life goals (the three blessings described in the Bible's Genesis) as expressed in his faith. The first fundamental life goal, "Be fruitful," means that mind and body should unite centered on a higher purpose. The second life goal, "multiply and fill the earth," means that we should create our own family and, based on stable families, create a peaceful community, society and world. The third basic life goal is to "reign over creation," which describes the goal of good stewardship over the environment and achieving a certain level of mastery, finding our place within the living environment. Faith can have a very positive impact on our efforts to accomplish these three life goals, setting up a moral compass, a higher ideal, he said. With a faith-based approach, young people can be oriented toward worthy life goals and a dignified lifestyle, he said.

The number of broken families gives us a mandate that the faith-based support network for families, especially young families, needs to be improved Mr. Gravrand said. He reported about his community-building project work in Zimbabwe, Senegal and other African nations. He sees the golden rule of "living for the sake of others," based on mind-body unity, as a great way to impact the society and the future world.

Mr. Ratnajit Sama, representing Hinduism, has been working in banking for 10 years and is married with a little daughter. Growing up in India helped him to understand the need for respect for diverse religions, he said. From very early in his life, the values of humility and great gratitude were instilled by his parents. The real joy of living a good life is that it provides self-esteem, he said. Training through various yoga programs can help us be disciplined and reach God.



We are taught in our family to take care of the poor and the weak, Mr. Sama said. There were different projects that his parents were involved in, mainly in service of the poor, the weak, organizing medical seminars, support groups, providing food. Hinduism aims to be a religion of perpetuity, he said. It believes that after this earthly life, there is another life to come. When thinking of day-to-day challenges, a Hindu must go beyond the self and try to reach out to other people. It is important to consider the whole world as one family. From the traditions in India, everyone is part of the great human family. All religions have something very positive to offer, but religion should involve the family. In this way things can improve, he said.

Ms. Jamie Morgan, representing the Protestant faith, is from a Methodist background and serves as an assistant to the Interfaith Executive Office of the WCC. She stated that for her, family is the place in time of need, providing economic stability, care, allowing young people to live valuable lives and acquire important life skills. For young people it is vital to have the backing of a family, so that we can become more socially involved, she said. Family provides a great contribution and reduces the number of homeless people. Currently there are countless situations of familial dysfunction, but those situations have always existed, she said. Many examples from the Bible demonstrate that families are not only a stabilizing factor in general but also, in case of problems, can heal, forgive and help to make a restart.

Ms. Kamaljit Kaur, representing the Sikh faith, felt that belonging to a strong family had a great influence on her life. Family is such an incredible backing, she said. Her example: She went through a divorce. Without her family's support, it would have been so difficult.

The family gives us the experience of a healthy and rewarding social life, Ms. Kaur said. Reconciliation and solidarity are learned naturally. In families children learn to act responsibly and live harmoniously with each other and for each other. A life of value in the family is supported by faith, she said. Finally we can say that the family plays the main role in faith and human development, and therefore it is essential to have a strong family.

Following the presentations, the floor was opened to questions and comments from the audience. The panel concluded with a resolution to be proposed to the conference plenary at the end of the meeting.

Session II: "War and Crisis Zones: Maintaining Familial Resilience"

The session chair, Mr. Michel Reymond, the vice president of UPF-Switzerland, opened the session by introducing the topic. Families in crisis zones are particularly vulnerable, while at the same time critically important to healing and a return to normalcy, he said. What coping systems arise when families are unable to meet the needs of their members? He gave the examples of street children, gangs, families without parents. In the absence of thriving families, what weight goes to social institutions? How can faith-based and other cooperative efforts contribute to solutions? This session showed the complementary perspectives of religious leaders and experts from the field of international relief organizations.

As the first speaker, Professor Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri, the deputy general secretary of the World Council of Churches, laid out briefly what the WCC stands for. Its main aim is unity among all churches, among

them the Orthodox, the Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, Reformed and many others. The WCC has a good working relationship with the Roman Catholic Church as well as the Pentecostals and other smaller church conglomerates, she said.

Nowadays there are different understandings about the family -- both traditional and progressive, Professor Phiri said. Holding on to the prophetic perception of families, the WCC tries to unify the understanding about moral and core values.

People want to celebrate families today, but one also must meet the wounds, she said, which are in quite a few trouble spots all over the world, for example, in South Sudan, Yemen, Syria, but also the Korean Peninsula, Kashmir, and other sites.



Last year Professor Phiri visited South Sudan and was confronted with the problems of polygamy that seems to affect the whole society, including church leaders. Due to long-lasting conflicts and wars, girls often are married to older polygamous men by their own family in order to guarantee their safety and protection from rape. It is a very complex issue that requires a wise heart of understanding, she said.

The WCC also addresses the issue of households being run by children, due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic that leaves many families without parents. Another big issue in various trouble spots is that of widespread domestic violence, mainly against women. This can be found even in households of Christian faith leaders, she said.

The next speaker was Mrs. Carolyn Handschin, vice president of WFPW International and director of its UN NGO liaison office. She started her presentation by asking why it is important not to ignore the family in our peace efforts worldwide. Reminding her listeners that the theme of the 2019 International Day of Families is "Climate Change and the Family," she asked whether we would accept plastic waste in our own backyard. Responsibility should be learned within the family, she said.

Mrs. Handschin related the story of an officer with the Swiss Department of Integration who through her activities saw the great effects of families on the problem of migration. Families are very much affected by migration, Mrs. Handschin said. The Swiss Red Cross recently joined other large NGOs in launching projects to protect families in war and conflict zones, also in the context of migration. Family counseling is proposed now for migrant families, because of the likeliness of migrant families falling apart. Helping family stability and protecting the integrity of the family are really essential also in the context of integrating migrants.

The family is so central, Mrs. Handschin said, because it is the first institution that teaches core values to children. Parents are the role models, and therefore children are in need of parents.

Although families also can be the source of great problems, the family provides an irreplaceable and very basic character education for children on how to be good and how to contribute to society. The husband-wife relationship is a model of leadership for the children. Mrs. Handschin emphasized the family's vital role in teaching a unique moral compass to the generations to come.

Rev. Pavel Samotovka, a priest of the Orthodox Community of Prague, Czech Republic, expressed his grief about the fact that Christianity and the Western world speak of peace, yet there is a big problem of war, conflict and violence.

He quoted Bible passages describing the history of humankind as being full of violence. Normally the Christian faith asks for a life of spirituality and of non-violence. Are violence and war God's will? Despite the fact that Christians believe in the resurrection through Jesus Christ, history has shown so much war and conflict.

How can we orient ourselves well in this postmodern, cosmopolitan world? Regarding the family, it is difficult to find a fitting definition, because of the changing attitudes and values in the world, Rev. Samotovka said. Reading a definition of the family as "a system of intimate relations founded on an institutional connection in a certain time and location," he asked, "In what way is the Christian concept of the family different?" From a religious point of view, he said, at the core there is the element that family exists for the sake of the glorification of God. We should love God and love each other. This is God's mandate to us.

The quality of the relationship between husband and wife defines the quality of the other relations in the family, Rev. Samotovka said. In Christianity, God is the provider, sanctifier and protector of marriage. The safety that children feel depends very much on the stability of the marriage.



Even though some people see war as a way to gain freedom, in general it is very destructive. Looking at the war in Ukraine, we can see its destructive effect on families. People live in continuous stress and insecurity about what the situation will be the next day. It is important to remember that the constant fear of having only 20 to 30 seconds to escape to a shelter has a very destructive effect on individuals and families, he said.

Ms. Heather Komenda of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) mentioned that her organization's approach, to work with families rather than individuals, is quite new. IOM most recently has become very aware that working with families is crucial in dealing with vulnerable individuals, she said, especially victims of human trafficking. IOM needs to broaden the assessment of areas of vulnerability, she said.

Programming was very much structured on the Palermo protocols adopted by the United Nations; there are similar needs for victims of trafficking and victims of violence, exploitation and abuse. During the migration process, so many individuals are subjected to extreme sexual violence.

Ms. Komenda spoke of her work on an IOM handbook on migrant vulnerability, identifying four separate levels: individuals, family, community and structural. IOM has very dedicated case workers who provide a full range of counseling and support services for individuals to return home in dignity. But when they return home, migrants may go back to the same circumstances as they were in before they migrated.

Family practices of all sorts impact individuals, Ms. Komenda said. IOM is looking at how to use the protection that families can provide to individuals, but also how families can put individuals at risk of violence and all sorts of abuse. It is very problematic not only for women and girls to return home, but also surprisingly difficult for young men and boys facing various sorts of challenges, she said. Men feel much shame, for example, because of the inability to provide for the family or repay debts, and women may feel shame because they were sexually abused.

Ms. Komenda said she currently is writing this handbook and the chapter on family programming. In the past, she said, IOM focused more on individuals and less on the family but very recently has identified the importance of working with families to provide services more effectively. The programs on "Family Dynamics and Migration" will be able to provide greater resources to address the migrant problem, she said.

In terms of children in migrant situations, it is even more important that the family is part of the approach, and IOM is trying hard to use that new focus on families, Ms. Komenda said. The changing structure of the family is certainly an important complication that could cause some additional issues. Although "IOM

came late to the party," she said, it is now fully committed to using programs with families to care for migrants in the best possible way.

Session III: "Thriving Families and Social Wellbeing"

The chair, Ms. Chantal Chetelat-Komagata, the secretary general of UPF-Switzerland, opened the session by briefly introducing the topic of the conference. In this session, five speakers presented programs in which strong families have become the mechanism to help cure societal problems, support healthy development of youth and effectively combat social ills. This session also looked into specific challenges of dysfunctional families from outside threats as well as from within. It furthermore showed some of the initiatives that have allowed families to fulfill their role in cooperation with the good work of supportive institutions.



The first speaker, Mr. Hafid Ouardiri, president of the Fondation de l'Entreconnaissance and vice president of the Geneva Interreligious Platform, pointed out the importance of interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Mr. Ouardiri emphasized the common values to protect life and families, which are the first principles of any interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Religion can limit our relations with one another, but this shouldn't be the case, he said. It is in the family that peace is learned and has to be realized. In his words: "The teaching of Islam reminds me that in order to go to God, we need to have an attachment to our family. We are all part of the same family of God. When we see how divided society is, it is very difficult to have harmony in the family. We together, as representatives of different faiths, have the responsibility to defend the family, which is the smallest cell of the society."

Mr. Ouardiri stressed the need for common sense, expressed in the founding document of the Geneva Spiritual Appeal, a document signed by religious leaders in 1999. He read the founding statement of the Geneva Spiritual Appeal, which urged world leaders to observe three key points:

- "1) A refusal to invoke a religious or spiritual power to justify violence of any kind,
- "2) A refusal to invoke a religious or spiritual source to justify discrimination and exclusion;
- "3) A refusal to exploit or dominate others by means of strength, intellectual capacity or spiritual persuasion, wealth or social status."

The next speaker, Ms. Deepa Grover, a senior adviser in early childhood development with UNICEF for the European Union and Central Asia, explained that UNICEF's key aim is working for peace, as working with children means working for peace. As UNICEF's key mandate is the well-being of children, working for children therefore means working with families.

A recently published document, she said, stated that the best investment is in early childhood development -- the period from birth to school entry. During this period there are vital developments happening with the child in almost all areas. Children at a very young age develop much faster than in any later period. Their good development depends on a good environment. UNICEF works with national governments so that the best environment for children's healthy development can be assured.

Situations of risk can have a great impact on a child's development, Ms. Grover said. Nurturing care is very important in this phase of a child's life. Good health, nutrition, quality of caregiving are particularly important for young children, because the early time is the most formative period.

There is a great need to focus on prevention of negative influences. The role of the family is very important to allow children to grow up in a safe and protected environment, Ms. Grover said. To support parents and families through the government's initiatives is vital for success, she said. Responsive caregiving responds to the child's needs. Which services enable the best support of the children? Finding answers to these questions is essential for every government, she said.

UNICEF believes that all families with young children need support, Ms. Grover said. The organization provides this support by working through governments, departments of health and all available services so that the risks for negative influences can be reduced as early as possible. Early-childhood education centers can help to create a common vision among parents, caregivers and authorities so that optimal results may be achieved. Such community-based kindergartens exist in Kyrgyzstan and in Tajikistan. There are various examples of collective efforts in various communities that can enable such a family-friendly environment. Ms. Grover quoted Mahatma Gandhi, "If we are to reach real peace in our world, we have to begin with the children."



The next speaker was Rev. Dr. Peniel Rajkumar, program director for the WCC on interreligious activities. He showed the direct link between social well-being and the well-being of families. As we are not living in an ideal world, we have to consider the situation of fragmented families and less optimal environments, he said.

The family is a cradle in which certain values are practiced and taught. The transmission of those values into practice is essential, he said. Interfaith activities are valuable because of the interrelatedness of all great values in all religions. However, he said, over the years we seem to have acquired a failure and fatigue in translating those precious values into action.

It is time for all people of faith to think how we can move beyond this impasse, he said. Faith by itself is dead, so the Bible says. Also failing to act on urgent issues is a sin too. The longest journey that one can make is the journey from the head to the heart, he said. We need to recover the kind of spirituality that endorses humanity as a universal, spiritual family, so that we can overcome all divisions and create the reality of one beautiful human family.

Dr. Rajkumar ended with a quote of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech: "I refuse to believe that humankind is stuck with racism and war so that peace and brotherhood cannot become a reality!" Dr. Rajkumar expressed the hope that this conference would stimulate all to contribute more fully and responsibly to the advent of a world of peace.

Ms. Giovanna Campello of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) joined the conference from Vienna, Austria, through a conference call. UNODC would like to present some tools that are being used around the world to empower and support families and parents in their important efforts to protect youth and prevent drug abuse and crime affecting young people, she said.

Simply said, UNODC is trying to help parents to optimize their educational efforts to help children avoid involvement in drugs, gang violence, etc. Strengthening the bond between parents and children is key to preventing drug use and crime, she said. For example, in Honduras improved parenting skills have proven very effective in very violent communities, protecting children from falling into aggressive or destructive behaviors.

Statistics prove very clearly the effectiveness of family-based programs in combating crime and drug abuse among youth, Ms. Campello said. If family cohesion goes up, crime and drug abuse go down. This is also visible in communities that have been displaced through war and conflict, as, for example, in Afghanistan and Syria.

UNODC's family-based programs are being implemented successfully in many cultures and nations. However, she said, these programs should be adapted to the cultural and religious environment in which they are to be implemented. Ms. Campello emphasized that if we all work together beyond barriers of culture and ethnicity, results can be optimized.

Participants of the conference saluted the valuable programs of UN agencies, using the family unit as a base to work with. The audience expressed that especially faith communities would have great interest in such family-based programs.

The last speaker of the session was Dr. Michael Balcomb, the regional chair for Europe and the Middle East of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), another organization that is affiliated with UPF. Dr. Balcomb began his presentation with a video about the "Peace Starts with Me" rallies and programs worldwide.



He mentioned the preamble of UNESCO, adding that the defenses of peace should be constructed in the minds of men and women, hinting at the precious contribution of women to peace throughout the world. He then stated that, in his opinion, the concept of "Peace starts with me" was more to the point than the UNESCO preamble.

Dr. Balcomb elaborated on the main theme of FFWPU programs of recent years. He then thanked all the partnering organizers of this conference, as well as the participants. Men are most frequently at the origin of wars and conflicts, but for peacebuilding efforts women are often more effective, he said.

Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, also known as Mother Moon, has been strongly emphasizing the need to realize that peace indeed starts with the individual -- me. The key message of FFWPU is that humanity is one large family with a common parent, God, who cares deeply about His missing children. Mother Moon's special message to all the conference participants is that "we all matter to God very much," because God is essentially our loving parent, Dr. Balcomb said.

FFWPU holds that this is a special time in which all faiths should work together for peace and sustainable human development, he said. The family is the key and the pivotal focus for learning about peacebuilding, but it also can be the source of great pain and disharmony. Dr. Balcomb documented some of FFWPU's latest marriage rededication programs to strengthen marriages and families around the world. He concluded his presentation by quoting the founders of UPF and FFWPU: "Let us create one family under our Heavenly Parent!"

After a short but lively discussion, the session was adjourned and the plenary took a short break in preparation for the concluding session.

Concluding Session

Representing the organizers, Mr. Heiner Handschin took the floor to conclude the conference. The representatives of the Sikh community offered a beautiful chant in their tradition to bring the conference to a harmonious unity. The conference organizers suggested a certain number of recommendations. Finally the plenary concluded to support the resolution that was offered by the Interfaith Youth Council, which reads as follows:

Declaration of the Interfaith Youth Council Assembly of May 14, 2019

As religions we owe allegiance to have in common the universal goal of creating and nourishing unity between all of humanity and respect for the inherent value of a family as both an internal and external force:

Internal, as it provides emotional and economic support and stability and a safe space for children to grow up in and for adults that same safe space to return to;

External, as it constitutes the fundamental building block of our civil society and engages in cultural exchange, social welfare and communal projects;

We – the members of the Interfaith Youth Council – would like to appeal to the leaders of this world, whatever their field of influence may be, to consider the following principles:

Projects to support young and growing families are never a waste of resources and money. They provide an invaluable environment for character education and form the bases of our society. The ever-growing class of working poor in western society is symptomatic of dysfunctional elements in our society that evaluates financial profit for the few more than financial stability for the many.

"Social welfare systems," like public education, housing projects, insurance, medical and palliative care, homeless shelters, day-care centers and so forth, are indeed very important and need our support. However, they can never replace a functional family but should rather work as an extension of and support for families.

Families can come in many different compositions and structures. They all have at their heart a harmonious union of the spouses that manifests itself in a mutual support and care. It is not up to any one of us to decide what their personal composition should look like, and most certainly not to retract our support because of that.

For the Youth Interfaith Council:
The President;
Kevin Aristide Cornelis De-Carli

To conclude the conference, the facilitator invited the Venerable Wimalarathana, president of the Zurich-based International Buddhist Foundation, to offer a recitation and chant for peace and well-being in the world.

He first offered a short meditation about the mind that is the master of the body; if the mind is polluted, the actions are polluted as well. He suggested that global education should focus on purity of the mind. "We all need to focus on universal love in order to create a lasting peace in the world," he said.

The conference ended with a colorful reception in the lobby of the Ecumenical Center.



Photo: Rémy Gindre