



International Day of Families 2019

“Interreligious Cooperation for Peace and Human Development - Creating an Environment for Thriving Families”

Ecumenical Centre - Heiner Handschin - May 14, 2019 - Geneva, Switzerland

Second Part



Photo: Rémy Girod

Dr. Isabel Phiri Ms. Carolyn Handschin Ms. Heather Komenda Mr. Michel Reymond Rev. Pavel Samotovka Dr. Juraj Lajda

Session II: War and Crisis Zones: Maintaining Familial Resilience

The session Chair **Mr. Michel Reymond**, Vice-President UPF Switzerland, opened the session by introducing briefly the topic: Families in zones of crisis are particularly vulnerable, while at the same time critically important to healing and a return to normalcy. What coping systems arise when families are unable to meet the needs of their members? (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.



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Panel on War and Crisis Zones: Maintaining Familial Resilience



Prof. Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri

As the first speaker, **Prof. Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri**, Deputy General Secretary World Council of Churches, laid out briefly what the WCC stands for: the World Council of Churches’ main aim is unity amongst all churches, amongst them the Orthodox, the Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, Reformed and many other churches. The WCC has a good working relation with the Roman Catholic Church as well as the Pentecostals and other smaller church conglomerates. Nowadays, there are different understandings about family; more traditional ones or more progressive ones. What is important that the WCC holds 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 must also meet the wounds, which are in quite a few trouble spots all over the world, like in South Sudan, Yemen, Syria, but also the Korean peninsula, Kashmir, and so forth. Last year Ms. 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, the girl children are often times married to older polygamous men by their own family in order to guarantee the safety and protection of the girl child from rape. A very complex issue that requests a wise heart of understanding. 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 the issue of widespread domestic violence, mainly against women. This can be found even in households of Christian faith leaders, which makes one wonder how they can think that God is on their side. These are a few issues that the WCC tries to tackle these days.



The next speaker was **Mrs. Carolyn Handschin**, Vice – President of WFP International, UN NGO liaison office Director. She started out her presentation with the question on “Why we had better not ignore family in our peace efforts worldwide?” She identified the current 2019 topic on the UN declared International day of Families of the as “Climate change and the family”. The issue here is clear. Would we accept all the plastic waste in our back yard? It is all about human responsibility which should be learnt in our family. Mrs. Handschin introduced her presentation with the story of an officer with the Swiss Dept. of Integration who through her activities saw the great effects of families to the problem of migration. Families are very much

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affected by the migration issue. The Swiss Red Cross has recently joined other large NGOs to launch projects to protect the families in war and conflict zones, also in the context of migration. Even family counselling is proposed now for migrant families, because of the likeliness of migrant families falling apart. So helping the family stability and protecting the integrity of the family is really essential also in the context of integration of migrants.

Why is the family so central, because it is the first institution to teach core values to children. Parents are the role models and therefore children are in need of parents.

Of course also families can be the source of great problems, sometimes through special situations these problems can come out more. The Family is providing an irreplaceable and very basic character education to children, how to be good and how to become a contributor to society. The husband and wife relationship is a model of leadership towards the children. Ms. Handschin ended the presentation with emphasizing the family's vital role in teaching a unique moral compass to the generations to come.



Carolyn Handschin, President WFWPI – Europe with Session Chair Mr. Michel Reymond, Vice-President UPF Switzerland

Rev. Pavel Samotovka, Priest of the Orthodox Community of Prague expressing his grief about the fact that Christianity and the Western world speaks of peace, yet there is a big problem of war, conflict and violence. He quoted Bible passages describing the history of mankind full of violence. Normally the Christian faith asks for a life of spirituality and of non-violence. Is violence and war God's will or what is its origin. He stated that the question here was rather, if we do believe in the creation of men by God and in the fall of men mentioned in Genesis. Despite the fact that we believe in the resurrection through Jesus Christ, history has shown so much war and conflict. How to orient ourselves well in this post modern cosmopolitan world? Regarding the family it is difficult to find a fitting definition, because of the changing attitudes and values in the current world. Some current definition: "the family is a system of intimate relations founded on an institutional connection in a certain time and location". He continued, by asking the question: "In what way is the Christian concept of the family different?" He stated that from a religious point of view, at the core there is the element that family is 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. 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. War is destruction even some people might see war as a way to gain freedom, but in general it is very destructive process. If we see the war in Ukraine we can see how much destructive effect it has on families. People live in a continuous stress and they are in a total insecurity of what the situation will be the next day. He concluded that it is important to remember that the constant fear of having to escape to shelters within the next 20-30 seconds has a very destructive effect on individuals and families.



Rev. Pavel Samotovka, Priest Orthodox community of Prague

Ms. Heather Komenda, Protection and Assistance Specialist, IOM

Ms. Heather Komenda, of IOM mentioned that the approach of the IOM to work with families contrary to individuals is quite new. She stated that IOM has most recently become very much aware, that working with families is very crucial in dealing with vulnerable individuals, especially those who were victims of human trafficking. IOM needed to broaden the assessment of areas of vulnerability. Programming was very much structured on the Palermo protocol; there are similar needs for victims of trafficking and those who were not like victims of violence exploitation and abuse. During the migration process, there are so many individuals subjected to extreme sexual violence. Ms. Komenda spoke of her work on a handbook of IOM on migrant vulnerability, identifying 4 separate levels, individuals, family, community and structural. IOM has very dedicated case workers who can provide a very full range of very individualized programs of counseling and support services for individuals to return home in dignity. But migrants when they return home, they may go back to the same circumstances as before they decided to migrate. Family practices of all sorts impact the individuals. IOM is looking at the circumstances on 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 much problematic not only for women and girls to return home, but also surprisingly difficult for young men and boys facing various sorts of challenges. Men feel very much shame, for example, because of the inability to provide for the family or repay debts, and women maybe because they were sexually abused. Ms. Komenda is currently writing this handbook and the chapter on family programming. She said that in the past the IOM focused more on individuals and not so much on the family but has very recently identified the importance to work with families to provide services more effectively. What IOM is trying to provide is a framework about migrant vulnerabilities not only focused on the individual but to integrate the issue of the family in the whole effort. The programs on “Family dynamics and migration” will be able to provide greater resources to address the migrant problem.

In terms of children in migrant situation it is even more important that the family has to be part of the approach and IOM is really trying hard to use that new focus on families. The changing structure of the family is certainly an important complication that could cause some additional issues. She concluded by stating: In a nutshell “IOM came late to the party” but is now fully committed to use programs with families to care for migrants in the best possible way.



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Session III: Thriving Families and Social Wellbeing

The Chair, **Ms. Chantal Chetelat-Komagata**, Secretary General of UPF Switzerland opened the session by briefly introducing the topic of the conference. In this session, five speakers would present programs where 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 successfully 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, that are the first principles of any interreligious dialogue and cooperation. He emphasized that religion can be also like a limitation that can make us unable to relate to one another. This shouldn’t be the case. He pointed out that these days there was an attack on the family because of greed and other selfish motivations. This destructive trend is very dangerous for our society. 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.” He stressed the need for common sense, expressed in the founding document of the Geneva Spiritual Appeal. Mr. Ouardiri in closing, read the founding statement of the Geneva Spiritual Appeal, that in respect for the dignity of the human being, mentions 3 key points that all religions in Geneva should be committed to: There can’t be any justification of violence, nor any justification for discrimination against anyone, nor any dominance of anyone over the others, in the name of religion.”

The next speaker, **Deepa Grover**, Senior Adviser Early Childhood Development, UNICEF EU/Central Asia, started out by explaining that UNICEF’s key aim was working for Peace, as working with children was also working for peace. As UNICEF’s key mandate was the wellbeing of children, working for children, therefore means also working with families as well. A recently published document stated that the best investment is to invest in early childhood development. Early childhood development means the period from birth to school

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Mr. Hafid Ouardiri, Fondation de l'Entreconnaissance



Ms. Deepa Grover, UNICEF Senior Advisor Early Childhood Dpt.

entry. At this time, there are vital developments happening with the child englobing almost all areas. Children at the very young age develop much faster than in any later period. The good development depends on a good environment. UNICEF works with national governments so that the best environment for a healthy development of the child can be assured. Early years show also that risks tend to accumulate. Some of these risks show to have a great impact on the child's development. Nurturing care is very important in this phase of children's care. What factors matter particularly at this time: good health, nutrition, quality of care giving, etc. 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 create that good environment for children to grow up in safe and protected environment. To support parents and families through the government's initiatives is very vital for success. Responsive care giving is the care that responds to the child's needs. What are the services that the family needs to enable the best support of the children? To provide anwers to these questions are essential for governments to focus on. UNICEF believes that all families with young children need support. How does UNICEF try to provide this support? Working through governments, departments of health and all available services so that the risks for negative influences can be reduced as early as possible. Set up early childhood education centers that could help to create a common vision among parents, caregivers and authorities so that the optimal results may be achieved. We have such examples of community based kindergardens in Kyrgistan. Other examples of such community centers are in Tadjikistan. There are various examples of collective efforts in various communities that can enable such a family friendly environment with the help of all. Ms. Grover ended the presentation with a quote of Mahatma Gandhi, "If we are to reach real peace in our world we have to begin with the children".



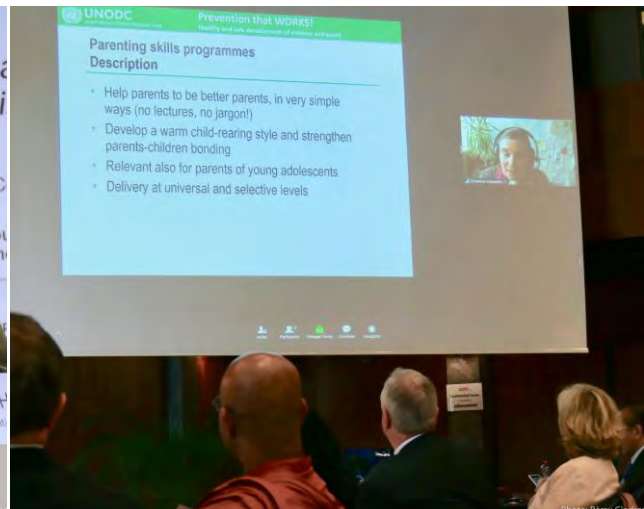


The next speaker was **Rev. Dr. Peniel Rajkumar**, Programme director of the WCC on Interreligious activities. He started out showing the direct link between social wellbeing and the wellbeing of families. As we are not living in an ideal world, we have to also take into consideration what is the situation of fragmented families and less optimal environments. Family is a cradle in which certain values are being practiced and taught. He emphasized that also the transmission of those values into practice is of key essence. It is important to focus on translation and transmission. Interfaith is valuable because of the interrelatedness of all great values in all religions. But again it is important to be aware of the fact that from spiritual values, there is a problem sometimes with how these values are being translated into a shared responsibility. He stated that this fact was key in order to protect the most vulnerable among us, so that the world can be a better place. Over the years we seemed to have acquired a failure and fatigue in translating those precious values into action.

It is time for all of us, people of faith, to think on how we can move beyond this impasse. 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. All things that we can learn from the family can be summarized on how we can bridge the gap between our head and our heart. We need to recover the kind of spirituality that is endorsing 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 Martin Luther King Jr, in his Peace Nobel 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 could be a call to all to contribute more fully and responsibly to the advent of a world of peace.



Rev. Dr. Peniel Rajkumar, WCC



Ms. Giovanna Campello, UNODC

Ms. Giovanna Campello of UNODC joined the conference from Vienna through a zoom 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 effort to protect youth and prevent drug abuse and crime affecting young people. Simply said, UNODC is trying to help parents to optimize their educational effort so that children are being helped to keep them away from involvement in drugs, gang violence etc. To strengthen the strong bond between parents and children is key to success in terms of drug and crime prevention. The more parental bond children have, the less all those negative influences can succeed. For example in Honduras, increased parenting skills have been 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. If family cohesion goes up crime and drug abuse go down. This is also visible in various places, including in displaced communities through war and conflict, like for instance in Afghanistan, Syria etc. UNODC's family based programs are being successfully implemented in so many different cultures and nations. It however needs to be mentioned that these programs should be adapted to the cultural and religious

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environment where they are to be implemented. Ms. Campello, to conclude, emphasized that if we all work together beyond barriers of culture and ethnicity, results can be very much 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.

As the last speaker of the session, **Rev. Dr. Michael Balcomb**, Chair of FFWPU in Europe and the Middle East. Dr. Balcomb began his presentation with a video about the “Peace starts with ME” rallies and programs world wide. 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 “Peace starts with ME” was more to the point than the UNESCO preamble. He elaborated on the main theme of the programs of the recent years of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, co-founded by **Dr. Hak Jan Han Moon**, who is the late wife of the **Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon**, both also co-founders of the Universal Peace Federation. (UPF).



Dr. Balcomb then thanked all the partnering organizers as well as participants. Men are most frequently at the origin of wars and conflicts, but for the peace- building efforts women are often more effective. Mother Moon has been strongly emphasizing the need for the realization that Peace indeed starts first with the individual, ME. What is the key message of FFWPU: 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



Rev. Dr. Michael Balcomb, giving the final presentation

FFWPU thinks, that this is a special time where all faiths should come together to work with each other for Peace and sustainable human development. The family is the key and the pivotal focus for learning about peace building, but it can also be the source of great pain and a disharmony. Dr. Balcomb documented some of FFWPU latest marriage rededication programs to strengthen marriages and families over the world. He concluded his presentation with a quote of words of encouragement 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 W. 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 Interreligious Youth Council Assembly of May 14, 2019

As the 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 economical 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;

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We – the members of the IRY-C – 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 are symptomatic for 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, insurances, medical and palliative care, homeless shelters, day-care centres 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 anyone of us to decide what their personal composition should look like, and most certainly not to retract our support because of that.

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



Concluding session

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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 Wellbeing 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 the purity of the mind. “We all need to focus on universal love in order to create a lasting Peace in the world”.



The conference ended at 17h00 with a colorful reception and cocktail in the lobby of the Ecumenical Center

Report by Heiner Handschin, UPF Switzerland

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