

UPF USA: UN International Harmony Week: Building Bridges Across Boundaries

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The Inter-religious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), a project of the Universal Peace Federation has hosted the United Nations' Interfaith Harmony Week program for 2021 on the theme of "Building Bridges Across Boundaries" on Thursday, February 4, from 2 – 3 PM.

The IAPD webinar brought faith leaders from different denominations, experts, and concerned civic leaders to share their understanding, wisdom, and practices as steps toward creating peace and ending the conflict.

We believe the Interfaith Harmony Week will provide the opportunity for expanding the foundations of unity globally among people seeking and committed to keeping dialogues and spread the messages to peacemaking.

IAPD has also been welcoming faith leaders from different religions every Thursday at 1 p.m. to read their Holy Scriptures and pray together.

Archbishop George A. Stallings, Jr.: Founder of the Imani Temple African American Catholic Congregation, and Chairman of the IAPD was the program moderator.

Tomiko Duggan, Senior Vice President of theft-USA: She welcomed over 1,000 guests joining on Zoom and Facebook links. She says that the faith leaders are here to share their wisdom and understanding and to share good practices regarding steps toward building bridges across the boundaries.

Our first speaker, Rev. Samuel King Kabu, Montreal, Canada: He is a long friend of the UPF said, I always recall the vision of Father Moon – his invitation to the world community to build a highway that will link all the continents. The purpose is not just for trade, but has spiritual implications, to connect all races, faiths in a common purpose of lasting peace. When we travel and meet other peoples, it changes who we are. We shouldn't be isolated; we need one another. Our time on earth is to learn God's nature and to learn how to love one another.

Where do we go from here? I used to run in relay races in track when I was young. We have the means to carry out Rev. Moon's vision, linking people around the world in a common purpose.

Bhai Sahib Satpal Singh Kalsa – Sikh Dharma: I bow before the divinity in each of you. Religion plays a part in the daily life of almost 90% of the world's population. But religious reasons are a major cause of conflicts in the world. But religious leaders can shape and influence the behavior of their followers on a peaceful path.

According to the UN there are over 200,000 faith-based organizations in the world. They can make a tremendous contribution to peace. The Sikh scriptures

explain there is one father and we are his children, one human family. Sikh scriptures teach self-discovery, exploration of your inner self to connect with the divine by reaching your inner self.

Our founder's approach was to identify the cause of differences, and to respect the teachings of the other diverse religions. Our scriptures contain wisdom and sayings of 30 saints from other faiths. No one is an enemy and no one is a stranger.

Religious leaders need to develop a consciousness of being bridge-builders and give this to our future generations. We need to accept we are all human children of the same God. We want to be a beacon of light for others. Sikh teachings are more recent than the major religions; it is a way of life, not a religion. The role of faith leaders is crucial to building bridges across differences between people.

Rev. Eric Manning – "Mother" Emmanuel AME: We are definitely lacking dialogue and interaction in this day and age. There is still so much hatred and emphasizing differences, instead of celebrating commonalities. I ask people to read in Gen. 1, where we see that God created everything. In Gen. 2:7 God

breathed into Adam and he became a living being. That same breath is in all of us. we are all created in the image of God.

This doesn't mean we will always agree, but it means we can disagree in a way that we don't tear each other down; instead we can work to restore each other's dignity. Faith leaders should be able to come together and help the world re-gain its moral and ethical compass, that we are all in this together. We can have different ways of doing things, but I can appreciate and embrace my fellow brothers and sisters as created in God's image. Getting to know our neighbor is saying, you matter; your feelings matter. When we reinforce that message then hopefully others will understand there is more that unites us than divides us. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, we may have arrived on the shore in different boats, but now we are all in the same boat.

Edmund Burke – the only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing. Faith leaders should be able to speak out against injustice, tell others how to appreciate and show love to others. When that day happens, then truly we can be free at last, as the spiritual says.

Hon. Terry Alexander – SC State Representative: I'm a die-hard country Baptist preacher, ordained for 34 years. I take pride and joy in serving humankind and seek to serve God's people.

We find ourselves in both the spiritual and the mundane in the world, trying to make the wrong right. I ache over the hatred that people are showing to one another. What makes a person hate someone else? My role as a pastor is to bring this question to light.

How do we make earth as it is in heaven, form a beloved community? I believe it's the charge of the faith leaders. All of us in the faith community must bear that cross. We are called to seek after God and to point people to God. I know from my experience that politicians are more concerned with being re-elected than in serving the people.

Those of us in the faith/political arenas should be guided by serving people, not the next election outcome. Politics should be guided by our religion. I tell my younger ministry colleagues that we should be concerned with eternity. Political affiliation shouldn't matter to the faith community, but instead that we all share in the one God.

If we use our faith to help, then it will help. Faith leaders called by God to serve in the political arena should always be mindful to share about God and God's beloved community, regardless of race, creed, sex or origin. Then help facilitate the fruits of the spirit. If there is going to be a change, it starts with you and me.

Imam Mohamad Ali Elahi – Islamic House of Wisdom, WI: In 1990 was the conference in San Francisco that I met the late Father Moon, and he said the reason God created us was not to collect money, power, knowledge; just to love one another. Thirty years after the conference we met in 2020 in Seoul and the resolution we signed – a global community of peace-loving citizens.

I'm so impressed by these words of wisdom from the faith leaders who spoke today. This is exactly the religion we believe – of love and unity. Anyone who

says they are speaking in the name of religion, but they promote hate and greed, we don't believe in that. The conference then was how we can educate ourselves and others in promoting peace, the culture of patience and forgiveness, reconciliation, respect, humility.

The Quran says, a peaceful heart and God is the origin and end of peace. How does it start from ourselves? The biggest war is not between north and south, Vietnam or Korea. The biggest war is inside everyone – to solidify in the army of evil or of good. That is the biggest jihad, the internal conflict between ignorance inside everyone.

When religion and intellect combine then we can have the journey of peace – from our heart, to our home, community, nation and world. Don't lie, don't insult or ridicule, don't spread gossip. Reply evil with goodness. Your call is to send peace even to your enemies.

Pres. Biden said let's work to fight anger, resentment, hatred, extremism, lawlessness, violence, disease, joblessness and hopelessness. Seven of these are internal. If we win that internal war, we can achieve eternal peace and share it with our family and world.

Dr. Jenkins: Thanked, everyone, to our viewers. We want to come together with these great faith leaders for the United Nations annual interfaith harmony week. We've asked some distinguished religious leaders to come forward and share their thoughts on peace and inspirations on how we can bring peace in every country, every culture, and do it with the blessing of God.

The Universal Peace Federation encouraged viewers and all faith leaders to create One Family Under God Global Community.