

Towards a New Vision for Human Rights

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'Human Rights: The Protection of the Un-empowered and the Dispossessed'
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Distinguished guests, Ambassadors for Peace, Ladies and Gentlemen! As Chair of the Universal Peace Federation in Europe, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to you all to this European Leadership Conference which is dedicated to the theme **'Human Rights: The Protection of the Unempowered and the Dispossessed'**. I am very grateful that we are able to meet about these crucial issues in such an iconic place as this “Mother of Parliaments” which has been instrumental over the centuries in advancing human rights and freedoms of un-empowered and dispossessed people around the world. I am thinking for example of its fight to safeguard the rights of the common people against the claim to absolute power of monarchs and its fight for the abolition of slavery.

The advancement of the human rights of all peoples is one of the core missions of the Universal Peace Federation and we see it as a key element in building lasting world peace. Simply put, if Universal human rights are not secured for all, there will be no lasting world peace! But of course the protection of the human rights of those least able to fend for themselves (the “Un-empowered and the dispossessed”) must be our paramount and overriding concern. The extent to which any society protects the rights of such people is perhaps the truest measure of its real concern for human rights and for the welfare of its citizens generally.

In relation to the un-empowered and dispossessed the traditional concept of human rights is too limited in itself to address their needs, which require us to think in terms of more embracing concepts such as “human security” and “human dignity”.

In particular we need to be concerned with the aspirations of the millennium development goals to end poverty and hunger, provide universal education, achieve gender equality and child health, combat Aids, attain environmental sustainability and create global partnerships. UPF is deeply committed to supporting the U.N. in achieving all of these goals and active in a great number of projects around the world aimed at doing just that.

You should know that unquestionably the driving passion for UPF’s concern with human rights and

dignity comes from our Founder, Father Moon. He is a person who has suffered as much as anyone from serious human rights abuses over the course of his life and experienced for himself what it means to be un-empowered and dispossessed.

The human rights violations he has suffered are well documented and too numerous to mention. They include torture almost to the point of death, extended periods of unjust imprisonment on 6 separate occasions in three different nations and almost three years incarceration in a North Korean “death camp. He has also experienced being “un-empowered” and “dispossessed” in such ways as: being separated for most of his life from his beloved family in North Korea; experiencing life as a penniless refugee fleeing from the horrors of war and living like a beggar on a single meager meal a day.

In short, there is almost no experience of deep suffering to which he cannot relate from his own experience. This enables him to deeply empathize with victims of any kind of abuse or hardship.

Where he is truly unique and exceptional is in his ability to rise from such experiences, to not be embittered or disempowered by them but rather to turn them around into positive energy directed at ensuring others do not suffer such things in future.

He staunchly preaches the importance of forgiveness towards one’s persecutors and has always practiced this himself. I feel it is perhaps in these areas that he has most to teach us all about resolving violations of human rights and in particular about how not to let them affect one’s ability to lead a fruitful and fulfilled life.

Ladies and gentlemen, we meet today against the backdrop of the tragic and deeply

troubling events unfolding in Syria. Surely, no current human rights or dignity issue could more clearly bring into focus today’s theme and the need to seek ways to prevent such tragedies in future and to help the victims.

To do this it is very important that we connect to a global vision for human rights and appreciate where this fits into the broader framework of humanity’s deepest aspirations. We need to ask ourselves certain key questions such as: What is a true basis upon which all humanity can enjoy such rights? Where do human rights really come from? Why are they so routinely violated? And of course, how can human beings best be protected from abuse of all kinds?

Invaluable and noble though the work of righting human wrongs is, UPF believes strongly that humanity would do far better to focus more on ensuring abuses do not occur in the first place. A proactive approach is best and prevention far better than cure!

To do this, we need to look not only at the relatively more external forces at work in society on the social, political and financial levels, but at the deepest wellsprings of the human heart that motivate and drive human behavior. I believe we need to search within the realms of morality, spirituality and religion, to find answers to these challenging questions and want to suggest that the long term solution is to be found in three main areas, namely the religious sphere, the family and our education systems.

First, let us look at the religious sphere. Perhaps the most vital and radical lesson that it teaches us is that our Creator never originally thought in terms of human rights for the simple reason that he never envisaged human wrongs. Rather, we learn that God created humans to be in His image and likeness – in other words, people of selfless love. In such a world there could be no question of abuse or exploitation of others and no need for any concept of human rights, because these could literally be taken for granted through each person fulfilling their human responsibility to love with the same selfless and unconditional

heart with which God loves.

That is why we need to look not only at the question of rights but also at the crucial issue of responsibilities. Human beings are unique among the various species in having been given a portion of responsibility for our own growth and development. Animals and other life forms grow to maturity more or less as part of an automatic process, guided by instinctual mechanisms. We alone of all species are called upon to exercise responsibility in our own spiritual growth and development and it is this that gives us unique value and dignity of a different order than any other living beings – provided of course that we exercise it correctly. In other words, we decide how fully human we become. We are given the highest potential to love others but it is up to us how much we realize that potential.

Every violation of another's rights is in some sense a failure of human responsibility and so this is the area in which we need most to raise awareness. For these deep reasons, however strongly UPF advocates human rights, it proposes that we focus even more on human responsibilities. If we do not, we are liable to become self-centered, focused more on what we can get than what we should give and more on how others treat us than on how we treat others.



The whole area of human rights needs a vision and concept of ideal standards of behavior rooted in the adoption of a universal ideology of altruism or “living for the sake of others”, as the only way that human rights for all will be able to be guaranteed.

Religion has played a crucial part in fostering human rights and human dignity down the ages, even if it must be admitted that religious people have often fallen very short in this area. Religions provide by far the most extensive network of effective human rights education that humanity has in place and we need more of it, not less! Those who decry religion can fairly point to destructive behaviors and damaging actions that religious people are guilty of, but tend to greatly understate the good works that religion fosters more than any other social institution.

Religions provide a moral and spiritual framework to sensitize us to the way we treat each other and demand selflessness in our dealings with them. They teach that we share a common origin, the source of

our sacred value and of the unique value of each human being as well as of the paramount importance of serving and loving others.

Violations of human rights, therefore, can be seen as rooted in moral failures and moral ignorance related to spiritual poverty. They entered the human experience at the point when we separated from God and became focused on our self-centered desires and concerns rather than on the parental guidance of our Creator Parents.

Increasing spiritual awareness gives rise to a greater collective will to ensure the well-being of all people. UPF therefore believes we should advance the core values of all the world's great religions, highlighting their emphasis on universal values.

In particular, we should find ways to ensure that spiritual wisdom routinely informs and influences the decisions of our great decision-taking bodies like The United Nations, The European Union and National Parliaments. For example The UN Human Rights Council should establish an "Inter-Religious Advisory Committee on Human Rights and Human Responsibilities" which would bring the wisdom of the world's religions to bear on this whole are.

Likewise, as UPF has long advocated, an Inter-Religious Council should be established within the U.N. structure of similar authority to the Security Council. There would be many benefits. Among them would be a far greater awareness and concern at the U.N. for how different peoples and races around the world are treated and with what heart. Let us imagine for a moment how this might have been able to help resolve the gridlock at The U.N. due to Russia and China exercising their veto, which has so tragically prevented U.N. peace keeping forces from being deployed in Syria and which was denounced by Secretary of State Clinton as "despicable". Yet again the U.N.'s potential effectiveness was blocked by naked national self interest. The situation cried out for the selfless intervention on purely compassionate grounds that a religious council within the U.N. could have championed.

Second, I cannot emphasize strongly enough how important the loving family is in establishing norms of good behavior by one human being towards another. The family may be considered as the main "school of love and ethics" wherein we learn to love, respect and serve others and find our true value in so doing.

By strengthening the institutions of marriage and family, we can ensure that our children are educated to respect all people regardless of differences, thereby establishing a culture of respect for human rights rooted in the family. By the same token, the tendency to violate human rights and the failure to uphold human responsibility tend to stem from a breakdown in the family. For example, we saw only recently here in the UK how youths, many of whom were from broken and fatherless homes, violated the basic rights of others as they rampaged through the streets of London and other cities, burning, destroying and looting as they went.

We have also seen time and again how despots and tyrants and those who exploit or abuse others emerge from troubled and disturbed family backgrounds. We need look no further back in history than Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi for examples of this.

I therefore believe it is vital that we do everything possible to strengthen marriage and nurture strong and loving families so as to ensure that our young people grow up to truly respect the rights and sensibilities of others.

Third, the curricula in our schools and educational institutions should teach clearly

about both human rights and human responsibilities. Given that families are so often broken and impart

the wrong values, it is vital that our education system does all it can to reinforce the lessons already being learned in good families about how to treat others, thereby helping to fill the gap left by broken or inadequate homes.

This can be done through a character education or moral education curriculum. Men and women who are taught to fulfil their moral obligations and responsibilities in their families, or among classmates, friends and associates, will naturally respect and live for the greater good of others, treating all people as members of their extended family.

UPF has increasingly been invited by governments around the world to present programs of character and human rights education to legislators, civil servants and members of the executive, as well as to mass audiences in schools and colleges. We would like to see such programs established at the heart of all the educational systems of the world, including of course, here in Western Europe.

Our program tomorrow at The Royal National Hotel will focus to a considerable extent on UPF's own distinctive vision for human rights and character education and will highlight the extraordinary extent to which our Founder Father Moon has dedicated his life to teaching humanity how we can eradicate the harmful and destructive behaviors that lead to human rights abuses and instead become truly loving beings who can approach all that we do (and especially our relations with others!) with a philosophy and heart of true love.

I would urge you to attend those sessions if you possibly can as they will expand on many important themes that I have only been able to touch upon briefly here this morning.

The main answer to problems relating to human rights, human dignity and human security is undoubtedly better education, but not primarily in the sense of developing our intellectual capacities, but rather the education of the human heart and spirit.

I look forward very much to meeting you all during the course of this conference and trust that you will find your experience here deeply meaningful and enriching! Once again, thank you for making the effort to come and contribute by your presence here! Thank you very much and God bless you all!

Dr Yong Cheon Song

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