

Global Assembly of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development

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Seoul, Korea -- World Summit 2020 featured a Global Assembly of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), which was held during three sessions on February 4 and 5 at the KINTEX Center. The IAPD Assembly focused on the theme "Toward a World of Lasting Peace: The Role of Religion, Interreligious Dialogue and Faith-Based Organizations."

After a candlelit prayer, the resolution of the 2020 Interreligious Association for Peace and Development was read and signed by more than 2,000 religious leaders from around the world. The resolution emphasized three determinations: first, to become people of faith who "bring about interdependence among religions"; second, to pursue peace in the world and on the Korean Peninsula by encouraging "mutual prosperity among all religions"; third, to pursue a world in which people and nature relate "based on universal values centered on God."



The welcome remarks were delivered by Buddhist, Moslem and Christian representatives. They honored the work and example of UPF co-founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, affectionately referred to as Mother Moon, and praised her lifelong standard "to give love and forget that you gave it," and the peace movement which strives to uphold "one human family under God."

Prophet Samuel Radebe, the founder of Revelation Church of God and the president of UPF-South Africa, reviewed the activities of Mother Moon since the passing of her husband, Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon (1920-2012). He listed Mother Moon's many achievements to make a better world. Speaking from the heart, he explained that especially Africa had experienced a "religious colonization," resulting in a

suppression of indigenous ways of worship. Transcending that, Mother Moon has been able to bring unity among religions. The magnificent Blessing festivals in Niger, Senegal, South Africa and more testify to her ability to embrace all the children of Africa, Prophet Radebe said. Mother Moon recognizes the value of not only Christianity and Islam but also the indigenous religions of Africa, he said. He concluded by saying that God's plan is that "we all come together and worship the one God in harmony."



Acting as moderator of the first session on February 4, Archbishop George Augustus Stallings Jr., the founder and pastor of the Imani Temple in the United States and the North American chair of IAPD, summarized that no single religion has cornered the ultimate truth. None is right while others are wrong, he said. All religions have an aspect of truth. "We are brought here together as a family of believers, so we should not keep ourselves isolated into our own houses, but come together as a family," he said.

From the panel, Imam Mohammad Ali Elahi, the spiritual leader of the Islamic House of Wisdom in the United States, said: "Galaxy of grace! This summit in Seoul is ten times as large as the one in San Francisco where I first met Reverend Moon 30 years ago. I see the same vision and diversity here. 'Is religion anything but love?' Remember the words of the late Martin Luther King Jr.: 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools.'"

Sheikh Mowafaq Tarīf, the current spiritual leader of the Druze community in Israel, explained how minorities are able to coexist in Israel. All religious communities are guaranteed equal rights, he said, but there are cases of persecution by ISIS, who have forced Druze citizens to convert to Islam and have destroyed their religious sites.

Archimandrite Rogelio Saéz Carbó, Greek Orthodox Church of Spain and Portugal, clarified that inter-Christian dialogue is theological, whereas the dialogue among the religions of the world is academic (philosophical).

Rev. Dr. K.B. Rokaya, the president of the National Council of Churches of Nepal, wanted to first thank God for Mother and Father Moon: "No one has done what they have done, and nobody will ever do it again." He began, "I am very humble, standing before you." Problems start when people stop fearing and worshipping God, he said. Secularization creates the problems we now have in the world, where religion is not allowed to play any part in civil ethics. Dr. Rokaya emphasized: "Let us fight together humanism, secularism and faithlessness. We must work together. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers. That is the higher war. We have to decide on which side we stand."

Shri Singh Bhatia, the European director of the Sant Nirankari Mission, United Kingdom, stated, "If we do not achieve peace, we will be divided in pieces." He said: "We can only share what I have -- thus I have to first achieve peace in myself before I can share it. Spiritualism is the only way we can achieve peace. We have tried communism and secularism. They do not work. Self-realization is the only way forward. God-realization is the only way. Teach through testimonies. When I see myself in each and every one of you, there is not competition, hate, violence," he said. "Let us celebrate the commonality among ourselves. We can speak all day about what we have in common. We do not need to speak about where we are different. There will be mutual prosperity."

Msgr. Martinho Germano da Silva Gusmao, advisor to the Catholic Bishop of Dili, Timor Leste, expounded on the Bible's Micah 6:8, advising the audience to practice justice and make room for religious leadership in society. True love is kindness, he said.

The session was closed out by Archbishop George Augustus Stallings Jr., the moderator, inviting all to join together in singing the song "Let There Be Peace on Earth."

Mr. David Fraser Harris, the secretary general of UPF for the Middle East and North Africa, served as moderator for the two sessions on February 5.

Mr. Fouad Sobbi, president, Mandaean World Congress, Australia, spoke of the Mandaeans as the world's first religion; of the Ginza Rabba ("Great Treasure"), the holy book of the Mandaeans; and of the old Aramaic language, going on to emphasize such values as love, sacrifice and patience.

Hon. Souffrant Evans, general director, Ministry of Worship, Haiti, spoke of the central importance of love, the need to oppose war, creating spaces for dialogue as UPF does, and the need to redress the imbalances of investment – from military to education. He emphasized the importance of honest, inclusive dialogue, especially that led by religious leaders. Men and women of courage can open the way to a better future, he said.



Swami Shantatmananda, head and secretary of Ramakrishna Mission, India, noted that there are conflicts everywhere and spoke of the Parliament of the World's Religions, which was held in 1893 in the U.S. city of Chicago, where Swami Vivekananda, the founder of the Ramakrishna Mission, encouraged the audience to have a brotherly feeling for humanity. "We need a spiritual revolution of the individual. When we serve our fellow man, we are serving God," Swami Shantatmananda said.

Ven. Dr. Bhaddanta Sobhita, a senior Buddhist monk from Myanmar, spoke of the need for dialogue and participation and working together as brothers and sisters. Although the world is globalizing, there is violence and conflict based on perceived ethnic and cultural differences, he said. At the heart of these problems, according to Ven. Sobhita, is a failure to fully respect human dignity, to understand and communicate with each other. He called for dialogue grounded in respect for the dignity of life.

Suhadi Sendjaja, Aceh Ulema Council (MPU), Indonesia, spoke about the arms race and moral decline, disasters and calamities, and of the need to bring out the intrinsic awareness inherent in every human being. He mentioned working with other religious communities, of projects like building a hospital, and of the need to replace chaos with order.

Rev. Yoshio Kawakami, professor emeritus, Tezukayama Gakuin University, and president of IAPD-Japan, began by saying that "you (each of us) are the most important person in the world." He emphasized dialogue – between nations, religions and people – and the need to understand and respect the other, to develop a humane character. We need leaders in love and justice, concerned with people, and we should be humble enough to ask for God's guidance, he said.

Dr. Andriy Yurash, director of the Department for Religious Affairs and Nationalities in the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, spoke of some worthwhile initiatives, such as the Ukraine Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (24 years in existence), but also of other realities, such as those who are building ideological justifications for war; the increase in hate speech and the denial of dignity. Some scientific studies are being undertaken with a view to providing better information and building bridges, he said.

Sheikh Nuru Mohammed, minister of religion, Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri Muslim Community of Birmingham, United Kingdom, asked what the role of religion is and emphasized the importance of three fundamental relationships -- with God, with the earth and with people – as a way to secure social justice, peace and love. In the face of the world's real problems we need leadership, he said, which is exemplified in the selflessness and sacrifice he sees in the life and actions of UPF co-founder Mother Moon.

Imam Talib Shareef, president, Majid Muhammad, United States, pointed out that the universe is "one big book that should be read." Religion must communicate a message of oneness, promoting unity, he said. He spoke of God's creation, Adam, being human – beyond race -- and that God is "evolving the compassionate creature."



Bishop Juan Habib Chamieh, president of the Commission of Eastern Churches, Argentina, listed four pillars of peace (justice, truth, charity and freedom). He then recalled a personal experience of peace at a time when he moved from feeling unworthy of forgiveness to a deep, genuine repentance, expressed not just in prayer or confession but to all. "Peace is your spirit. Peace is written into God's creation," he said.

Dr. Hussein Kim Dong Eok, president, Korea Muslim Federation, has served for 30 years as an ambassador and witnessed many different cultures and religions. "In the end, we are all equal under God," he said. "The essence is to love people, to love the world."

Sheikh Mohamed Khan, convener IAPD-Kenya, offered a set of proposals to chart a way forward for IAPD.

1. Create a set of rules to guide interfaith harmony.
2. Organize IAPD into continental chapters, each with its own council.
3. Set up a Global Council with regional representatives.
4. Create a calendar of activities in collaboration with UPF International.
5. While UPF may provide funding to continental chapters, push the chapters to seek independent funding.
6. Encourage partnering to enhance IAPD's identity, for example, the Sikh Awards in Dubai (February); Laudato Si, hosted by the Vatican in May; and participate as election monitors for the May elections in Burundi.
7. Organize a year-end World Clergy Leadership Conference (WCLC) program.

Monsignor Nicolas, patriarch, Orthodox Patriarchate of Nations, France, argued that any action must be based on a foundation of humility, respect for others, personal prayer and internal peace. He said it would be a good idea to build on the success of the December 2019 gathering of religious leaders in New York by holding similar gatherings on each continent and even in each nation. "Such gatherings would foster friendship and understanding and provide opportunities to strategize and cooperate," he said. "This would strengthen religious leaders, enabling them to better reach out to their own communities and to such wider circles as the media and the political world. We have to show by our actions that the love of God is in us."

Father Yacobos Abu-Aaqel, priest for the Arabic Orthodox community in Israel, exhorted the participants: "Don't separate faith from friendship. Human beings are the best creation. Love each other deeply; love covers a multitude of sins." Father Yacobos spoke from the heart; so much so that a Shia participant rushed to the podium to embrace him. Tears followed.

Rev. Wako Higashi, chief priest, Chokoan Buddhist Temple, Japan, told the audience of a simple yet consistent action undertaken with a heart for peace. In Hiroshima, Reverend Higashi walked 6 kilometers to a memorial site for the 140,000 people who died there as a result of the U.S. military detonating an atomic bomb over the city in August 1945. He walked the same route every day for 365 days for the souls of those who died. He was seeking forgiveness. Gradually everyone came to know him, and after 365 days, he was joined by 200 others. He is planning to build a place in Hiroshima where people from many different backgrounds can come to pray.

Most Ven. Dr. Hongsa Boriboun, deputy director general for Sangha Foreign Affairs, Central Buddhist Fellowship Organization, Lao PDR (CBFOL), Laos, said he was honored to attend the summit. As Buddhism has developed in many areas of the world, its focus is morality, meditation and wisdom, he

said.



Father Joseph Saghbini, archimandrite of the Melkite Catholic Church, Lebanon, said, "True peace is the fruit of faith. Without peace and security there is no human development." Father Joseph renewed a call he made in Vienna in February 2016 – for a council of religious leaders and intellectuals in our countries.

Mrs. Ruth Cleaver, president, Auckland Interfaith Council, New Zealand, explained that the council is grassroots and voluntary. It started as a response to the growth of minority religions in the city in recent decades. They aimed to build friendship – to make "the other" into "my brother." Following the shooting of 100 Muslim worshipers praying in a Christchurch mosque in March 2019, the religious groups contacted each other and proposed a peace vigil. "We expected 40 to come, but 4,000 attended. The following week was declared an open mosque day. The people of New Zealand oppose Islamophobia and stand together," she said.

Rev. Father Devasiri Pieris, Diocese of Colombo, Church of Ceylon, Sri Lanka, spoke about the Easter Sunday bombings of April 2019, when three churches in Sri Lanka and three hotels in Colombo were targeted in a series of coordinated Islamic terrorist suicide bombings. These acts of terrorism were aimed at a specific group on their celebration day. Amid a storm of reaction and calls for justice, the statement of the cardinal changed everything: he spoke of love and forgiveness, calming the situation. This was an example of religion bringing peace in a situation of real conflict.

Ven. Balangoda Ananda Chandrkeerthi, senior lecturer, Bhiksu University of Sri Lanka, explained about the importance of developing our mind: "We end up fighting each other if we haven't overcome the desire and hatred in ourselves. But every person has the same color of blood. We have to practice kindness to all; be concerned about the suffering of others; rejoice in the success of others; and keep a balanced mind."

Summary

What is the thread running through these sessions? Surely it is trust that the same living God will work and be present in many varied ways on the basis of actions and lives of integrity, rooted in faith. Across the whole range of the world's faiths the same values shine through: sacrifice, patience, compassion, respect, love and forgiveness. Whether the action be healing after an act of hatred or walking in search of forgiveness, gathering to support and plan, building a hospital, or working to change myself, in each case religion has the potential to play a positive role and be a peacemaker. IAPD can look forward to many new forms of interfaith cooperation, hoping to open the way for the goodness of all to inform and influence our world, opening up new and wider paths to peace.