

## UPF International's Peace Talks program: Covid-19 Crisis' Impact on Families

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UPF International, New York—The fifth program of UPF's Peace Talks series, "The Covid-19 Crisis and Its Impact on Families," had almost 300 participants from 84 countries.

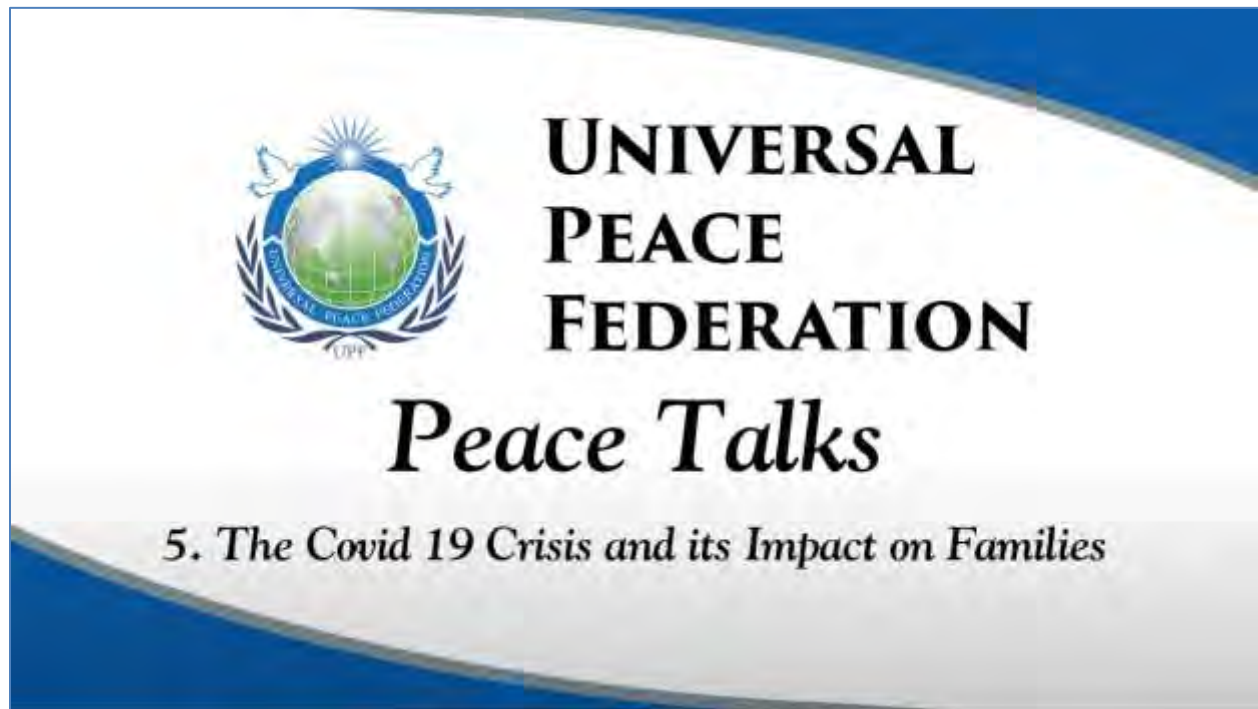
Dr. Thomas Walsh (Chair, UPF International) gave the opening remarks and introduced the panelists. He noted that the conference's date fell on the UN International Day of Families, inaugurated in 1993, whose theme this year theme is "Families in Development: Copenhagen and Beijing+25."

### Panelists

Professor Bahira Trask (Professor and Chair, Human Development and Family Studies, University of Delaware) stated that these last few months have been some of the most demanding on families in living memory. Poor families, working-class families, and families of color are bearing the consequences of the crisis disproportionately. Homeless and displaced persons are in even greater danger due to the inability to shelter in place. In addition to the economic and physical health crises, we face an overwhelming mental health crisis as a result of social isolation. Nevertheless, some families have seen benefits from sheltering in place together. Families who would not otherwise have the opportunity to bond as much as would be ideal are now able to spend quality-time together. Dr. Trask spoke very highly of the ability for ofwage replacement programs, such as that in the United Kingdom, to alleviate the extreme economic anxieties due to the crisis.

Dr. Rima Salah (Former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations) noted the occasion of the International Day of Families. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated existing issues: children living in conflict-affected areas and refugee camps are at great risk as health-related services and education

become more difficult to obtain. Migrants and refugees face xenophobia and discrimination, which have worsened with the crisis. Although children are less susceptible to the symptoms of the virus itself, the consequences of lockdowns, separation from caregivers, and loss of economic resources will be highly traumatic and detrimental to development. Dr. Salah called for an inclusive approach to the welfare of children during the crisis, offering access to testing, shelter and other resources to all children, whether they are rich or poor, native citizens, migrants or refugees. Early childhood services are a powerful and effective tool for building a world of peace and opportunity.



Professor Clare Huntington (Dr. Joseph M. McLaughlin Professor of Law, Fordham University), pointed out that the crisis exacerbates existing inequalities and vulnerabilities within societies, as well as aggravating problems within families. We have evidence that child abuse and domestic violence are on the rise, but we lack information on the scope of the issue; victims do not have the same opportunities to report and escape violence that they would under normal circumstances. Doctors and teachers are not seeing children routinely and are not able to report suspected child abuse. Dr. Huntington called for an approach that supports rather than punishes families. Courts and social services in the United States are under strain in the best of times, but lockdowns have them overwhelmed. Dr. Huntington closed with an observation that American schools vary wildly in their resources, and this has led to huge disparities in the quality of education during the crisis.

QandA Followed: An attendee asked for thoughts on how to better cope and increase well-being during the crisis. Dr. Trask suggested teaching conflict resolution skills, as well as spreading information about the kinds of supports available to individuals and families. Dr. Salah emphasized community-based action. On the issue of work–family balance, Dr. Trask said that family leave policies are highly effective in promoting that balance. Dr. Huntington reiterated that, though the challenge is daunting for all families, poorer families struggle much more due to lack of support. A final question dealt with what should happen after the crisis. Dr. Salah called for better, more inclusive social policies to build economic resilience and social cohesion. Dr. Trask emphasized the importance of human connection and policies to strengthen and support families and children from early childhood through adolescence. Dr. Huntington underscored that family and social institutions must be supported in order to achieve stability.