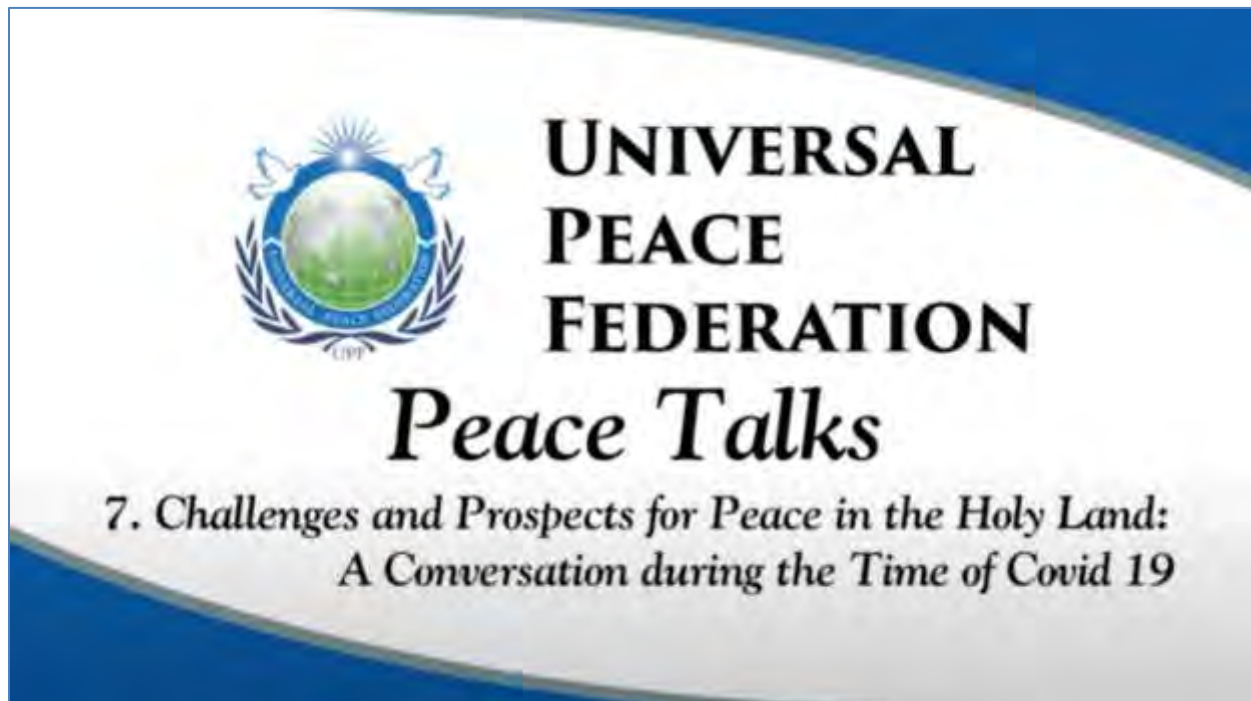


UPF International USA's Challenges and Prospects for Peace in the Holy Land

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UPF International, United States -- On the morning of May 29, 2020, UPF International held a web conference titled "Challenges and Prospects for Peace in the Holy Land: A Conversation During the Time of Covid-19." The conference had over 300 participants from 52 countries.

Dr. Thomas Walsh gave the opening remarks and introduced the panelists. During this time of the coronavirus governments have their hands full addressing the immediate challenges of the crisis, he acknowledged. The political and economic impacts are equally enormous and widely felt. This week's panelists discuss the political, social and economic context of the issues facing the Middle East and offer their recommendations for constructive steps toward dialogue, peace and development that might be taken by governments or non-state actors in civil society, the private sector, and faith-based organizations.



Panelists

Dr. Eldad Pardo (Lecturer and Research Fellow, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Head of Research, IMPACT-SE Institute for Monitoring Peace in School Education) connected the current situation in the Middle East to two major events in 1979: the Iranian Revolution and the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. These events represent the two approaches that have defined events in the region in the decades since: the radical, destructive approach and the diplomatic, constructive approach. He emphasized the need for peace education in the Middle East. After 9/11, there was a concerted effort in many Arab countries, such as Jordan, to expunge radicalism from mainstream education. There has been a slow but effective progress in undoing decades of "hate-based" education and establishing more constructive perspectives.

Mr. Daniel Sherman (Strategic Consultant and Lecturer of Middle East Affairs and Politics, Israel) made a distinction between two ideas of peace: peace as an absence of war, and peace as the presence of liberty,

justice and respect for international norms. In recent years, the former idea has prevailed. Mr. Sherman spoke optimistically of the potential role of the Arab Israeli minority in building peace between Israel and Palestine. There have been major miscalculations in American Middle East policy throughout modern history, and future miscalculations resulting from poor communication and the lack of de-escalation protocols could be disastrous. There are many options available to the current government of Israel that could make a future two-state solution more stable, and Mr. Sherman called for those options to be taken seriously. He warned against miscalculation in U.S. relations with Iran.



Hon. Gözde Dizdar (Founder/Managing Director of Governance and Development, Turkey) explained that the "twin disasters" of the Covid-19 pandemic and the collapse of oil prices have rocked the region. Iran has been the regional epicenter of the pandemic, and the Middle East has reported over 220,000 cases. Worldwide lockdowns have dropped oil demand so dramatically that the price of oil has fallen below 0 dollars per barrel. These events have transformed and complicated ongoing regional crises, increasing the number of refugees and internally displaced populations. Though these challenges are daunting, the crisis brings opportunities for positive change: Investment can be shifted from weapons and security towards health and technology. Hon. Dizdar concluded that the opportunity still exists for a greater, more prosperous future.



Imam Faisal Abdul Rauf (Co-Founder and Chair, Cordova Initiative; Founder, American Society for Muslim Advancement) connected the lockdown to the Muslim tradition of contemplative retreat during Ramadan. He further connected recent events to the passage in Isaiah about beating swords into ploughshares. The general direction of modern history has been from war to peace, he suggested. He was less enthusiastic about a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine than about growing interdependence between the two peoples leading to economic and social union. He called for visionary leadership on both sides to move towards increased cooperation. The pandemic crisis has created stresses for governments, contributing both to the weakening of the nation states and to a shift in the balance of power between governments and their people.

Rt. Revd. Riah El-Assal (Anglican Bishop, Jerusalem, 1998–2007) quoted Albert Einstein: "Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order -- in short, of government." Regarding the current situation, the bishop feels that the cause of peace hasn't been affected by the

coronavirus: On the contrary, people view the coronavirus as one more problem that faces the human race. He said that Palestinians are entitled to a state of their own with East Jerusalem as the capital; West Jerusalem would be the capital of Israel. He suggested the world city of Jerusalem be governed by a municipal council representing the three faith traditions, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim, so it can be viewed as the capital of peace.



QandA followed: On the question of whether Covid-19 constitutes a common enemy sufficient to bring Israel and Palestine together, Dr. Pardo challenged the notion that a "common enemy" is needed. Peace does not require an enemy, he said. Mr. Sherman likewise challenged the idea of looking for enemies, seeing "mobilizing-against" as a keyway that leaders manipulate their peoples against their own interests. Hon. Dizdar called for more communication and education about regional problems. Imam Rauf finished the discussion by reiterating that humans are images of God walking on earth and asking for a celebration of religious and cultural diversity in recognition of that idea.

(Due to technical difficulties Bishop El-Assal's message had to be recorded and inserted. He was not available for the question-and-answer session.)

