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UPF TODAY

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO PEACE



PEACE & SECURITY CONSULTATIONS

Leadership Conferences

Religious Youth Service

Interfaith Harmony Week



FROM THE PUBLISHER



UPF TODAY

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO PEACE

AS this issue of UPF Today goes to press and as the Lunar New Year approaches, we are preparing to launch the World Summit 2013 on Peace, Security, and Human Development in Seoul, Korea on February 21-25, 2013, gathering more than 300 international delegates, including presidents and prime ministers, religious leaders, academics, and representatives of civil society. The World Summit will demonstrate the substantial growth of UPF as a leading organization for peace, known throughout the world.



Dr. Thomas G. Walsh
President, UPF

This issue contains reports of significant UPF programs held in the latter half of 2012. Of particular note in 2012 was a series of conferences dedicated to the promotion of dialogue and cooperation between the European Union and Russia. The report from Vienna shows the quality and substantial content that was evident in that conference. UPF-Europe also hosted leadership conferences in Brussels and Berlin as well as several youth forums.

On the other side of the world, UPF-Asia convened a leadership conference in southern Thailand, near the border with Malaysia, where conflict has intensified in recent years. Representatives of the Thai government, as well as from the Thai Interfaith Council which UPF helped to initiate, were present. Other interfaith consultations took place in India, Israel, and Jordan.

Our Peace and Security Forums continue to address national and international concerns, and this issue includes reports from Afghanistan, the US, Israel, and Japan. We are also very pleased to report on several projects from UPF's Religious Youth Service program, which is an important part of UPF's mission and work. As always, UPF is working to support the work of the United Nations, hosting programs on commemorative days.

We hope you enjoy this issue of UPF Today. Thank you for your ongoing interest and support for the work of UPF. We are making a difference.

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UPF Today is the membership magazine of the Universal Peace Federation, founded by Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon. Envisioning peace as a state of harmonious interdependence among individuals, families, nations and peoples, UPF advocates constructive and original practices that contribute to achieving a unified world of peace, the hope of all ages. The magazine offers a forum for Ambassadors for Peace—fostering human development, good governance, public service, and collaborative peace efforts involving religions, nations and nongovernmental organizations.

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Austria	Germany	Nepal	Thailand
Belgium	India	Pakistan	United Kingdom
Brazil	Indonesia	Peru	United States
Canada	Israel	Philippines	Zambia
Czech Republic	Japan	Russia	

COVER:
Consultation with H.E. Mohammed Karim Khalili, Vice President of Afghanistan (4th from right); (inset pictures) European Leadership Conference, Berlin, Germany; Religious Youth Service project, Puttlam District, Sri Lanka; World Interfaith Harmony Week program, Sao Paulo City Hall, Brazil

UNIVERSAL PEACE FEDERATION IN SUPPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK 2013

This age of globalization needs enlightened people in each faith who can examine their sacred writings and traditions and identify the aspects that can benefit all humanity as well as those that preserve each religion's identity. The UN designated the first week of February every year as World Interfaith Harmony Week with the motto of "Love of God and Love of the Neighbor" / "Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbor." UPF and its network of Ambassadors for Peace celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week each year, calling on people of faith to honor the Divine indwelling in a way that encourages understanding, respect, and cooperation among people of all faiths for the well-being of our communities and peace in the world.



CANADA



BRAZIL



PAKISTAN



NEPAL

MOLDOVA



RUSSIA





Sessions of the conference on “Europe and Russia, Partners in a Globalized World” took place at the UN Vienna International Centre.

Leadership Conferences

By UPF International

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

Europe and Russia as Partners in a Globalized World

An International Leadership Conference on the topic “Europe and Russia, Partners in a Globalized World,” in Vienna, Austria, on October 12 and 13, 2012, was organized by UPF-Europe and UPF-Eurasia in cooperation with the Academic Council on the United Nations System and the Women’s Federation for World Peace. It built on the Russia-Europe Dialogue held in Moscow six months earlier.

The first day’s sessions, at the United Nations Vienna

International Centre were attended by more than 250 participants from several European countries and the Russian Federation. Peter Haider, Secretary General of UPF-Austria, referred to the delicate role Austria played in relation to Eastern and Western Europe after World War II, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the breakup of the USSR, and developments afterwards.

In a video message, the President of the Austrian Parliament, Mag. Barbara Prammer, commended the conference organizers for their initiative. She stressed her belief in the importance of the perspectives of youth for the future of Euro-Russian relationships, and she expressed her conviction that a focus on the role of women in Europe and Russia would help advance their common goal of a peaceful and just world.

Then the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Austria, H.E. Sergey Nechaev, spoke about the importance of building relationships on equal terms between the European Union and Russia, and the need for a speedy resolution of the issue of visa-free travel between Russia and the European Union. He noted opportunities to develop economic cooperation and called for “a dialogue among equal partners who are willing to listen to the arguments of each other.”

Dr. Werner Fasslabend, Minister of Defense of Austria from 1990 to 2000, reviewed the relationship between Russia and Europe. Five hundred years ago, after the end of the Mongol dominance, Russia linked herself to Europe and especially Austria, since it was then the seat of the Habsburg Empire. He mentioned the intensive opening of Russia towards Western Europe, led by Czar Peter the Great, and Russia’s influence on European history. He urged the participants not to remain in a mindset of the Cold War but to understand that this era is over.



Panelists explored ways to increase trust and cooperation between Europe and Russia.

An Ambassador at Large of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Anwar Azimov called for improved trust between Europe and Russia, reminding the audience that Russia is Europe's closest and most reliable neighbor and its major trade partner.

Dr. Thomas Walsh, President of UPF International, quoted UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's statement that: "the global problems we face today are simply too complex to be solved by governments alone. They require collective and coordinated action by government, by the private sector, by civil society, by academia, and by international organizations and multilateral development banks."

The Secretary General of UPF-Eurasia, Mr. Jacques Marion, reminded the audience that the UPF Founder, Dr. Sun Myung Moon, emphasized that Russia could link Europe not only with Asia but also with the North American continent by building a Bering Strait crossing and developing international highway networks to promote development and peace.

BONN, GERMANY

What Kind of Europe Do We Want?

In light of recent discussions about the crisis of Europe in general and the European Union in particular, a European Leadership Conference in Berlin, Germany, convened November 15-17, 2012, and featured 20 presentations assessing the situation and presenting possible solutions.

A spokeswoman of the German Society spoke about the challenges of helping citizens of the reunified Germany understand and identify with Europe as a political and cultural entity that transcends the nation. Ambassador Ian Marius De Jong, former Netherlands Ambassador to the UN, made his case for a Europe with high moral standards of good governance. "We owe it to the citizens of potential new member states to support their objective of getting rid of sometimes ingrown practices of poor government, leading to corruption and political favors."

One session dealt with the political crisis in Europe. Dmitri Marchenkov, Secretary of the Current Affairs Committee in the Council of Europe, stressed the need for citizens to be more involved in democratic processes. "Democracy needs more substantial forms of interaction between people and authorities in order to include direct democratic elements in the decision-making process." Dr. Willem van Eekelen, former Defense Minister of the Netherlands, reminded the audience of the origins of the European Union in the Coal and Steel Union that was founded in 1951; over the decades it has developed into a political entity and has become a global player along with other world powers. Dr. Walter Lichem, former Ambassador of Austria to Canada and Chile, noted that in post-war Europe, the goals and direction of the Union were clearly defined, but national



Speakers in Germany reviewed Europe's history from a variety of perspectives and expressed optimism for the future.

interests, combined with a loss of overall direction, make the conference's topic timely.

Karl-Christian Hausmann, President of UPF-Germany, gave a historical analysis of Europe's Greek and Christian heritages as two distinct yet complementary branches of historic development. "After overcoming nationalism and communism, where do we go from here?" he asked. After commenting on the great progress on the technological level, he said that much needs to be done on a spiritual level.

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

What More Can Europe Do to Advance Human Rights?

The European Economic and Social Committee joined in cosponsoring a European Leadership Conference on December 4 and 5, 2012, in Brussels, Belgium, just prior to Human Rights Day, on December 10. Dr. Yong Cheon Song, Chair of UPF-Europe, reminded participants that the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the European Union for having contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy, and human rights in Europe for more than six decades.

A former Director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, Dr. Aaron Rhodes, said the European Union has advanced human rights by requiring that candidates for membership meet criteria regarding the rule of law of human rights. A current challenge is for the EU to ensure that its policies reflect the democratic choices made by its citizens. He described the conference as a good example of how civil society can highlight important ideas and principles and bring them to the attention of peoples and governments.

Mr. Doudou Diène, a former Director of the Division of Inter-cultural Projects at UNESCO, suggested that Europe needs to move from preaching to practicing human rights, pointing to a tendency to sideline human rights concerns since the 9/11 attacks. Proposing an "inter-culturalism," he



Speakers in Brussels urged greater efforts to advance human rights both in Europe and abroad.

suggested focusing on the common values of the various religions as a way to facilitate communities in living together more peaceably. Johannes Cornelis “Hans” van Baalen, a member of the European Parliament, discussed the role of the European Parliament in promoting human rights. The roles of women and youth in advancing human rights were addressed in additional sessions.

The final two sessions took place in the European Parliament and addressed Europeans’ concerns about the genocide in Rwanda and the ongoing sexual violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Ms. Philomène Uwamaliya spoke about surviving torture in Rwanda. Humphrey Hawksley, a BBC World Affairs correspondent, explained that the minerals found in many laptops and mobile phones come from the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and the competition for these “conflict minerals” has led to much violence. Employees of a large banking group talked about their strategies to pressure banks on this issue, and Charlotte Simon, originally from the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, spoke passionately of the need to stop the killing, rape, and torture in the region.

JAKARTA, INDONESIA

Drawing on Indonesia’s Philosophy of Pancasila

At a December 8, 2012, UPF conference at Indonesia’s Ministry of Regional Affairs, 300 leaders from all walks of life explored ways to build peaceful and just societies. Speakers drew on Indonesia’s state philosophy of *Pancasila* and spoke of the need to live together in harmony irrespective of race, religion, ethnicity, etc.

Leaders of government, politics, the diplomatic corps, academia, civil society, women, youth, and business came from 12 countries, including representatives from six foreign embassies to Indonesia.

Recognizing the urgent need for leaders of integrity, Hon. Irman Gusman stated that “UPF’s wisdom in endorsing the state ideology of *Pancasila* and the Four Pillars of Nationhood demonstrates its vision for a strong and stable Indonesia.” Dr. H.A. Muhaimin Iskandar, Minister of Manpower and Transmigration, called the conference theme relevant to political and interfaith issues. Former First Lady Dr. Sinta Nuriyah Abdurrahman Wahid expressed her hope that the conference would produce policies that could address the challenges Indonesia faces regarding leadership, peace, and morality, and advance the dream of a just and prosperous nation.

On behalf of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Mr. Machasin explained the Ministry’s mission to serve all religious communities in Indonesia, which besides enhancing the religious life also includes promoting good governance and protection from misuse of religion as a tool of injustice.

Mr. Taj Hamad, Secretary General of UPF International, touched the hearts of all present with his humorous greetings citing many paradoxes of the modern world. Dr. Chung Sik Yong, Chairman of UPF-Asia, described UPF’s vision for peace and good leadership based on the desire to “live for the sake of others,” comparing it to parents who live for

A conference in Jakarta affirmed the pluralistic composition of Indonesia and its vision of diverse people living together in harmony.



*Pancasila includes
belief in the one
and only God, a
just and civilized
humanity, the
unity of Indonesia,
democracy guided
by the inner wisdom
in the unanimity
arising out of
deliberations among
representatives,
and social justice
for all of the people
of Indonesia.*

the well-being and happiness of their children. The Vice Chairman of UPF-Indonesia's Advisory Board, Dr. Payaman Simanjuntak, moderated a session on inter-religious cooperation. Speakers affirmed the pluralistic composition of Indonesia and the need for ongoing respect and cooperation among people even within the same religion. The deliberations sparked lively interactions.

Mrs. Genie Kagawa, Deputy Director of UPF's Office for UN Relations, outlined how the UN seeks to empower women throughout the world, and she presented a vision for developing the Global Women's Peace Network. Mrs. Yenny Wahid, Director of the Wahid Institute, spoke about the crucial role women can play in peacebuilding as well as nation-building. In the interreligious spirit of the conference, representatives from several religions joined on stage to close the day with prayer.

KATHMANDU, NEPAL

Freedom from Violence in Nepal

At a November 22, 2012, rally in Kathmandu, former Speaker of the House of Representatives Hon. Taranath Ranabhat testified about the UPF Founders' contribution to the peace process in Nepal, beginning with their visit to Kathmandu in 2005 to deliver a Peace Message. At that time, the Maoist insurgents and the government's Seven Party Alliance signed



Delegates release a dove as a symbol of the desire of the Nepali people for peace.

a 12-point Memorandum of Understanding that ended a decade-long Maoist insurgency.

Speakers at the rally expressed deep gratitude for the UPF initiatives that are awakening citizens to the possibility that peace can be attained through love, unity, mutual respect and understanding, living for the sake of others, and—most importantly—not through violence.

The road to peace has been rocky. Nepal's Constituent Assembly, elected in 2008, has failed to draft a constitution, and new elections have been repeatedly postponed. Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal, President of UPF-Nepal and Minister of Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation, called for increased dialogue and for implementing a 2011 agreement to reintegrate and rehabilitate ex-combatants, draft a constitution, and initiate state restructuring.

MANILA, PHILIPPINES

Principles of Peace and Leadership in Asia

Four hundred distinguished delegates from throughout Asia attended an International Leadership Conference in Manila, Philippines, on January 11 and 12, 2013.

Manila's Mayor Alfredo S. Lim warmly welcomed the delegates, noting that his city has long experienced a convergence of cultures, religions, and nationalities. In that spirit, the conference included addresses by Archbishop Deogracia S. Iñiguez, Chairman of the Episcopal Commission on Public Affairs for the national Catholic Bishops' Conference; Bishop Lucrecio Alaban from the Capitol United Evangelical Church; and Justice Saaduddin Alauya, Juristic Consultant on Islamic Law.

Hon. Thalatha Athukorale, a Member of the Parliament in Sri Lanka, described how her nation has emerged from three decades of strife. She offered a woman's perspective on the roots of social ills and injustice, and voiced an aspiration that people can live under a "common umbrella" irrespective of caste, creed, nationality, ethnicity, or race. Other international speakers included Hon. Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee, granddaughter of the late Mahatma Gandhi, and Prof. Dr. Quanyi Zhang, Associate Professor of Zhejiang Wanli University in the People's Republic of China. Speakers from UPF-Nepal and UPF-Thailand described peace initiatives in their countries.

Dr. Thomas Walsh, President of UPF International, paid tribute to the Philippines as a nation dedicated to peace, moderation, and human development. He spoke about "Marriage and Family as the Foundation for World Peace" as a prelude to the Interfaith Peace Blessing Festival at the Smart Araneta Coliseum. Other related events included women's and youth assemblies and an inauguration of the International Peace Leadership College.

The Significance of Interfaith Understanding

By UPF International

THAILAND: INTERRELIGIOUS COOPERATION

Leaders from five religions—Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism—offered invocations at the opening of an International Leadership Conference in southern Thailand on the topic, “Good Governance and Interreligious Cooperation for Lasting Peace.” The October 5-7, 2012, conference took place in the province of Songkhla, the gateway to the three southernmost provinces of Thailand.

The conference brought together 350 participants from 21 nations, including scholars of religion, diplomats, and political and community leaders. The sincere words of welcome by Mr. Surapol Panusampol, Vice Governor of Songkhla; Dr. Chung Sik Yong, chair of UPF-Asia; and Dr. Thomas G. Walsh, President of UPF International, were very well received by all delegates.

Gen. Charan Kullavanijaya, President of the Assembly of Buddhist Organizations of Thailand, gave the keynote address. He spoke about his nation’s

criteria of good governance, which include legitimacy, transparency, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and righteousness. He concluded by saying, “It is my belief that all religions teach virtues to people. The most important thing is then to promote clear knowledge of those religious virtues and their application.”

Sessions focused on topics such as “The Role of Leaders in Good Governance for Peace,” “The Role of Interreligious Cooperation in Peacebuilding,” “The Situation in Southern Thailand,” “Innovative Approaches to Peace,” and “How to Strengthen Families as a Foundation for Peace.”

Dr. Robert Kittel, Director of Education of UPF-Asia, and Mrs. Ursula McLackland, Secretary General of UPF-Asia, presented peace principles illustrated with quotations from various sacred texts, sparking the interest of the Thai audience, who were mostly Buddhists and Muslims. High-level leaders in their fields, including government ministers, members of parliament, religious leaders, and government officers, gave stimulating and useful presentations that were appreciated by all participants, who filled the hall during every session. A joyful celebration marked the first anniversary of the Interreligious Peace Council in Thailand. This was the first large international conference in the region that addressed the problems of the three southernmost provinces of Thailand, where there have been separatist movements within the mainly Muslim population. The conference encouraged intercultural and interreligious understanding, good governance, and balanced national development.

JORDAN: THE AMMAN INTERFAITH MESSAGE RECONSIDERED

It was no coincidence that UPF chose to hold a conference in Amman, Jordan on “The Significance of the Amman Interfaith Message,” that was originally drafted in Jordan in 2004. At a time when radical changes are sweeping the Arab world and efforts for peace are



Religious leaders in Thailand pour water from different glasses into a common bowl signifying their commitment to interreligious cooperation for the sake of peace.



Dr. Hamdi Murad delivers the keynote address at a conference in Jordan on the Significance of the Amman Interfaith Message.

needed now more than ever, UPF encourages ongoing dialogue about the positive role of religion in bringing people together in peace. As the nation that produced both a major Islamic call for interfaith cooperation and the proposal that launched the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week, Jordan seemed the obvious choice for the December 20-22, 2012, gathering.

Working closely with Jordan's leadership, UPF invited religious leaders, Protestant, Catholic, Sunni and Shi'a, from across the region. Jordan's Grand Mufti and Government Minister for Religious Affairs discussed the significance of the Amman Message, while later sessions featured responses by speakers from Palestine, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Tunisia. A key to the success of such a conference at this time of regional instability was the patronage of former Jordanian Prime Minister, Faisal Al Fayez. In addition, UPF is grateful for the support of Al Etihad Al Watani, one of Jordan's emerging political groups, in securing the necessary permissions and arrangements for a smoothly run conference, and for the untiring efforts of Dr. Hamdi Murad, whose keynote address set the tone for the gathering.

Articles that reported on the conference in Jordan's three major newspapers emphasized the stabilizing effect of the Amman Message over the past few years. In the words of Jordan's Minister for Islamic Affairs, "The Amman Message shows the true image of Islam, which is God's desire for human happiness and well-being." He mentioned that this message was launched from Amman to reflect the reality of the pillars of Islam and to stress that the Islamic civilization has made effective contributions to the development of civilization throughout the ages. Noting the global upsurge of intra-national conflict, Dr. Thomas Walsh, President of UPF, described the strengths of the Amman Message as its readiness to address intra-religious tensions, its refusal to be satisfied with a defusing of tensions or mere tolerance, and its quest for full acceptance and goodwill.

Father Joseph Saghbini, auxiliary patriarchal vicar for the Melkite Catholic Church in Jerusalem, highlighted the centrality of the Palestinian problem as an obstacle to peace efforts in the region and described a series of dialogue conferences in Jerusalem, one of which gathered 500 Christians and Muslims.

Speakers at later sessions included Dr. Mohammad Habash, who appealed for help for his native Syria, recognizing that Jordan was a good place to develop a common understanding and that dialogue involving all people of faith – including Christians, Druze, and Alawites – was important; Sheikh Mohamad Ali Al Hajj from Lebanon, who spoke from close experience of the divisions brought by civil war and of an effective Beirut initiative called "holy people without borders"; and Ayab Abbas from Iraq, who spoke of the shattered rainbow of diverse faiths in his country and the need to develop practical initiatives and inspiring foundations, referring in particular to the Art of Living Foundation's Trauma Relief program in Iraq over the past nine years. Other speakers addressed the referendum then taking place in Egypt, questioning the content of the proposed constitution and the "democratic" process of the referendum, the "democratic" changes in Tunisia, the threats to religious pluralism, the role of women, and the democratic process itself.

During other sessions, Jordanian women speakers were at the forefront: Mrs. Haifa Al Bashir, a pioneer among Jordanian women and active in the field of charitable work, highlighted the importance of the family as the "first cell" in the peace process, and therefore of the vital role of women who need to "plant tolerance and values in the souls of children." Mrs. Zuhour Rabadi,

Released by H.M. King Abdullah II in Amman, Jordan on November 9, 2004, the Amman Message has sparked constructive dialogue about what Islam is and what it is not and also what actions represent Islam and what actions do not.

INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING

a Jordanian Christian, spoke of her various projects with the Women's Federation for World Peace, asking everyone to remember the suffering mothers – Palestinian, Jewish, Iraqi, and Syrian.

One especially full session included four key Islamic leaders and one Christian. The muftis of the armed troops, civil defense, public security, and the national gendarmerie were joined on the panel by a Jordanian Baptist minister and an extremely able interfaith moderator. The session was not without its lighter moments, notably when the mufti beside the moderator passed him a note indicating that his time was up!

In his closing remarks, after thanking both the conference patron and the local partners, UPF's regional chair for the Middle East and North Africa, Dr. Young Tack Yang, told of his longing to find a solution that would bring peace to his native, divided Korea; of his initial skepticism at the naïve-sounding advice of UPF's founder ("North-South unification will be accomplished by true love"); and of coming full circle to realize that, in the end, it will always be love that trumps method.

INDIA: INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN GOA

Governor Bharat Vir Wanchoo inaugurated a November 5, 2012, conference at the International Centre in the state of Goa by stating that religious fanaticism and ignorance about other religions lead to violence. "Religions have not become outdated or extinct," he stated. "They teach us to live for the sake of others; to become other-centered, not self-centered. The spirit of all religions is one and the same—human happiness and unity. India's contribution to global peace can and must be its rich spiritual tradition of religious harmony."

UPF-India honors the potential of all religions to promote global peace and stability, recognizing that all religions have common principles that can be used to promote harmony and unity among people. "One of the focuses of UPF is interreligious dialogue," said Hon. Eduardo Faleiro, Chairman of UPF-India, in welcoming the participants. "UPF's motto, 'One Family under God,' is a concept I deeply believe in and it resonates with Indian traditions." He commented that the religious leaders who would be speaking not only preached religion but practiced interreligious harmony on a daily basis.

Three things made this conference unique and successful: the high level of religious leaders attending and their longtime personal relationships; the support from the Indian government; and the genuinely interreligious statements from the representatives of Islam and Christianity, which have a history of focusing on conversion in India.

The conference was addressed by eminent religious leaders of the Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh faiths and moderated by Krishna Adhikari, Secretary General of UPF-India. Excerpts of their statements follow:

Acharya Srivatsa Goswami, Acharya of Sri Radharaman Mandir: "We must not only work for interreligious dialogue and harmony but also work with governments and civil society. Religions can become respectful partners for human development. If interreligious dialogue is not coupled with interfaith action then pluralism is bane. True interreligious dialogue and cooperation are the essence of religious pluralism's great strength."

Advocate Irfan A. Engineer, Chairman of the Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism in Mumbai: "Religions have core values and rituals. The rituals will always be different and unique. We must go beyond the rituals. We must find the core spiritual values in our faith tradition which are in other faiths too. The highest value in religion is love."

Imam Umer Ahmed Ilyasi, Chief Imam of the All India Imam Organization of Mosques: "India is the heartland of religious diversity... The concept of tolerance leaves room for a negative element, but respect is only positive. We must respect the faiths and values of all religions. Respect the diversity of all religions."

Shivamurthi Shivacharya Mahaswamiji, seer of Taralabalu Jagadguru Brihannath in Sirigere, Bangalore: "Nation-states have well defined boundary lines. But the boundaries between religions can be even stronger. Therefore, religious leaders need to ask



The Governor of the State of Goa, Shri Bharat Vir Wanchoo, lights a lamp to open a conference on Interreligious Peace and Harmony.

themselves, 'Is our preaching prejudiced to favor our own religion, or are we preaching in order to teach people higher spiritual values?'"

Fr. Sebastian Painadath, Society of Jesus, founder and director of the Sameeksha Centre for Indian Spirituality: "Religious pluralism in the Catholic Church accelerated after the Second Vatican Council, which acknowledged and sought to promote good social and cultural values in all societies. No two leaves on a tree are the same, even though the roots and sap are one. Respect for all religions comes naturally to Indians, we are born with it."

Singh Sahib Manjit Singh, Chairman of the Sikh Institute of Spiritual Studies and former Jathedar of the Akal Takht Sahib: "Religious harmony is like a bouquet of flowers. Each flower has its own color, its own fragrance, and its own shape. Nonetheless, when they are put together in a bouquet then the individual beauty is enhanced even more. The best way to live our religion is by practicing true love."

JERUSALEM: INTERFAITH AND PEACE

Ten academic and religious leaders convened at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem on October 31, 2012, to discuss issues related to interfaith dialogue and cooperation among religions. The director of UPF's Jerusalem Office for Interfaith and Interreligious Cooperation, Dr. Nurit Hirschfeld, pointed out the potential of interfaith initiatives to "evoke the spirit of cooperation and peace in Israel and the entire Middle East region."

Participants offered a variety of suggestions for promoting understanding, including addressing students at schools of other faith traditions and visiting hospital patients of all faiths. Joint study of sacred texts was recommended as a way to wrestle with problematic aspects of one's own texts as well as those of other faiths. It was felt that this can help overcome boundaries built by ignorance about other religions and perhaps help people understand their own religion better.

Over lunch, people shared some of their experiences promoting interfaith understanding. Sheik Jaber Mansur told stories about his grandfather, who spoke Yiddish with his Jewish friends, and a rabbi who conversed in Arabic with his Druze and Muslim friends.

Sheik Samir Asi, Imam of El-Jazar Mosque in Acre, reported about his work to strengthen cooperation between Muslims and Jews, especially in his area of northern Israel. "My religion advocates that the human being is the most precious thing in the whole world, even more precious than religion itself," he said, introducing the following anecdote:

"Six years ago I organized a delegation of young Arabs and Jews along with a rabbi to visit Poland, including Auschwitz; it was an unprecedented trip. I stood in front of 2,500 people in the mosque announcing the trip. They were against the idea, but I firmly stated that there was no reason not to go. After all, we were not involved in that horrible evil, so we must let the Jewish people know that we feel their pain. It wasn't easy to convince them, but eventually I received their support!"

A second forum, on December 20, focused on a joint study of sacred texts, starting with Islam. A short presentation about the five pillars of Islam introduced the creed, five daily prayers, charity, Ramadan fast, and pilgrimage to Mecca. Continuing with Judaism, several texts on the subject of peace addressed the conflict between the desire for peace and the need to follow an absolute truth and lead a life of absolute justice. Then texts were circulated about the role of Christ as a gateway for the people, and in correlation to the role of the temple in Judaism.

A vigorous discussion followed presentations by an imam, rabbi, and priest. Regarding the status of women in religion, some thought that the status of women in their own as well as other religions should be reformed, while the others expressed satisfaction with the way their religion treats women, calling any mistreatment a misuse of the holy scriptures. It was decided to invite the wives of the religious leaders to participate in an upcoming forum to discuss the issue further.

Some participants pointed out difficulties within their own religion that create barriers for dialogue and peace, while others saw religion as a natural road for peace and harmony, especially among those of the Abrahamic faiths who believe in the same God who calls for peace and love among all human beings.

Several questions were raised in an effort to expand one another's horizons. In Islam, can charity be given to members of other religions as well as needy Muslims? Can Christians consider the ideal of unity to apply not only to the followers of Jesus, but also to other religions? Can the central sentence from the Jewish prayer that asks God to bring peace upon Israel be understood in a way that does not disregard the rest of the world?

A lively discussion continued over lunch, and new friendships were forged.



Participants in a Jerusalem Interfaith Forum



Peace and Security Forums

By UPF International

CRISIS IN THE SAHEL

Dr. Sulayman S. Nyang, professor and chairman of the African Studies Department at Howard University in Washington DC, USA, moderated a November 19, 2012, forum in Washington DC about developments in the Sahel. The distinguished panel of experts represented several diplomatic missions and think tanks.

In 2010, a major famine fell upon the Sahel when high temperature killed the crops, leading to health problems, diarrhea, malnutrition, and sometimes starvation. Meanwhile, poor farming methods and soil erosion contributed to further desertification of the region.

The Sahel is dealing with complex problems where humanitarian, political, and security concerns intersect. An estimated 18 million people live in the Sahel, a massive belt of semi-arid land below the Sahara desert crossing Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mali, northern Nigeria, Cameroon, and Senegal. The ecological and humanitarian crisis is caused by poor rainfall and failed harvests and aggravated by the conflict in Mali that has seen scores of people fleeing to neighboring countries as refugees. Armed attacks, kidnappings, arms trafficking, and human trafficking threaten the entire region.

Participants agreed that a military approach is only one component of a much needed solution which should also include a regional, long-term, sustainable strategy of economic and social development among governments and international institutions, both inter-governmental and non-governmental.



Dr. Sulayman S. Nyang of Howard University (center) moderates a forum on the Sahel.

Panelists endorsed an integrated regional strategy outlined by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

Help the countries of the Sahel to stem the terrorist threat, fight organized crime, and control the proliferation of weapons.

Promote inclusiveness, conciliation, and mediation to decrease tensions within and between countries. Hold regional forums with government officials, religious leaders, civil society, and cross-border communities.

Build regional mechanisms for early warning, disaster risk reduction, livelihood support, and social protection.

Help the countries harness renewable energy, better regulate their extractive industries, improve water resource management, adapt to climate change, and regulate land tenure and access.

The problems in the Sahel demand long-term, multifaceted solutions. Hunger, flooding, terrorism, corruption, etc., need sustainable solutions. International donor support must continue. Hope must continue. Speakers urged the global community not to forget the millions of men, women, and children who need their help.

TENSIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND JAPAN

A roundtable discussion on the tensions between China and Japan centering on the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands took place in Washington DC on December 19, 2012. Dr. Alexandre Mansourov, visiting scholar at the U.S.-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, structured the discussion in three areas:

CHINESE MOTIVATION

China's motivation behind the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute is to prevent a rebellious precedent from forming.

The motives for agitation behind the dispute over the islands, beyond a common desire to survey them and utilize potential natural resources, differ between Japan and China. Japan considers maintaining the islands to be a way to solidify its national influence in the region and project its strength; it would also provide a security buffer against an expanding China via U.S. security cooperation obligations. China fears that allowing the Japanese to seize the islands would set a dangerous precedent for protesting Chinese control of territories. It might prompt territories such as Taiwan and Tibet, areas that China claims or controls, to initiate their own protests for self-control. China's revived agitation over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands provides the country an opportunity to rally nationalist support for Chinese self-determination and solidify its control of other territories.

SECURITY RISK

The chance of a serious security crisis or new "Cold War" forming from this dispute is unlikely, since several nations have an investment in ensuring stability.

The seriousness of the security situation is uncertain. Many argue that China is building up its military forces for aggressive expansion rather than exclusively for defense, and radical forces in Japanese politics, such as Tokyo governor Ishihara, may push for more aggressive action on Japan's side or seek to escalate the conflict as an excuse to push for relaxed restrictions on the Self Defense Force operational capability. General consensus



Dr. Alexandre Mansourov (center) moderates a forum on tensions between China and Japan.

within the discussion group was that outright violence was too contradictory to the interests of both sides and their allies to be of significant concern. China has an opportunity to prove to the international community that it can act according to internationally accepted rules and standards by resolving the dispute peacefully with Japan and Taiwan as partners. On the other side, U.S. political and economic investments in the region make it unlikely that Japan will be permitted any truly overt aggressive maneuvers without the aid of its ally.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

There are a number of nonviolent options to resolve the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute.

Suggestions included a joint resource survey of the islands and surrounding territory, and if resources are found, a joint development agreement should be made. Another proposed solution was to create on the islands a peace park or war memorial acknowledging the actions and sacrifices made by both nations and their allies during World War II; this could establish the islands as a site of peaceful exchange and dialogue. Finally, there was the suggestion of an analysis of the dispute by the international community using neutral definitions and legal precedents, to be conducted by a neutral third party. If necessary, this would lead to international adjudication. All nonviolent suggestions were received positively.

A noteworthy suggestion was the possibility that Japan might sell the islands to China. Should Japan's economic situation deteriorate as China's economic strength continues its ascent, Japan may be compelled to do this to raise cash. The idea was considered by participants, but considered unlikely.

SUSTAINING ISRAEL'S NATIONAL RESILIENCE

A Peace and Security Forum at Israel's Haifa University on December 25, 2012, was hosted by Admiral (ret.) Ami Ayalon, Chairman of the Executive Committee at Haifa University, and moderated by Professor Eliezer Glaubach, a historian and a political writer. Mr. Hod Ben Zvi, senior advisor of UPF-Israel, discussed the input that international powers have on the development and sustainability of Israel's national resilience, especially in light of the power shift in the region to newly emerging democracies.

Professor Benjamin Miller, Head of the International MA Program in Peace and Conflict Management at the University of Haifa, discussed recent developments:

- Democratization and the implications of moving away from authoritarian regimes towards the power of civil society
- The rise of a variety of Islamic identities that were previously oppressed in the Arab nations
- The failed state problem that threatens some Arab countries, leading to revolutions, civil wars, and the collapse of the social order

Dr. Eldad Pardo, a senior researcher at the Truman Institute of Hebrew University and a specialist on Iran and Middle East studies, noted the diverse models in the region: Israel is a Jewish democratic state with a Western profile; in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, a minority rules the majority; Saudi Arabia is the guardian of Islamic holy places and Arabism; Qatar has used its resources to upgrade its status, especially through news

media. He credited the broad support received by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to his focus on universal values rather than fighting only for African-American rights. "We should tell a compelling story to create a good model that all people can accept," he concluded.

Col. (ret.) Moshe Zurich of the Israeli Defense Force Intelligence Corps noted the uncertainties in Egypt and Syria and predicted that they will impact Lebanon, Jordan, and Iran. Moreover, "Israel is unclear on the issues of the Palestinians, the West Bank, Hamas, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Syria's political situation after the revolution might become Israel's biggest threat. Israel should develop a clear self-definition and then relate to the response of other nations."

Adm. Ayalon's main concern was the balance between fighting terror on the one hand and keeping a democratic and an ethical attitude on the other. He described democracy not as a system of majority power but rather as a system where human and minority rights are protected. "Essentially, Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side; however, how can we get to that point when there is such mutual hate and distrust? We have to move into a new phase of constructive unilateral moves by both sides as long as they bring us closer to the goal of peaceful settlement, and ask the international community to support such steps."

Mr. Jeremy Jordan, Secretary General of UPF-Israel, presented a case study of Hong Kong's success in dealing with refugees and economic weakness. "It took an opportunity and dealt with refugees in a way that brought an economic advantage."

Sheik Ali Birani, an expert in Middle Eastern studies, pointed out that the western world in general and Israel in particular do not properly understand the Islamic faith, its religious laws, rulings, and manners. Overly simplistic views of the "old-fashioned" Arab world might lead to insufficient assessment and to outdated strategies.

APPROACHES TO PEACE IN AFGHANISTAN

About 25 people gathered in the Serena Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan, on December 15, 2012, for a forum on "Innovative Approaches to Sustainable Development and Peace." After an opening recitation from the Holy Qur'an by Mr. Ahmad Sear Suhail, Mr. Umberto Angelucci, Director of UPF-Afghanistan, presented the history of UPF in Afghanistan over many years.

Hon. Sayed Ishaq Gailani, Member of Parliament, addressed the gathering and said he would welcome a stronger UPF presence in Afghanistan. Dr. Chung Sik



Participants in a forum on Israel's national resilience



Women from Japan and India pay a courtesy call on H.E. Mohammad Karim Khalili, Vice President of Afghanistan, after a forum in Kabul on Sustainable Development and Peace.



Hon. Sayed Ishaq Gailani, member of the Parliament of Afghanistan

Yong, Regional Chair of UPF-Asia, explained UPF's principles of peace and sustainable development, which are based on the motto of living for others. UPF President Dr. Thomas G. Walsh described UPF's global work promoting universal moral and spiritual values.

Women leaders from three nations spoke. Mrs. Fatana Gailani, Founder and Chair of the Afghan Women's Council, said that women and children are the real victims of violence. Mrs. Sreerupa Chaudhury Miyra, Chair of the Committee for National Policy for Empowering Women (India), highlighted the historical role of women in peacebuilding. Mrs. Keiko Kawai, liaison between the Women's Federation for World Peace in Japan and in Afghanistan, read a speech given by Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon to an international women's assembly in Korea several months earlier.

LESSONS FROM FUKUSHIMA

Mr. Tetsuya Endo, Former Acting Chairman of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission and Member of the Independent Investigation Commission on the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Accident, addressed a July 18, 2012, Peace Diplomats Forum organized by UPF-Japan. Excerpts of his address follow:

On March 11, 2011, an enormous earthquake hit the northeastern region of Japan at a magnitude of 9.0, one of the most powerful quakes in Japanese history and even in the world. It was followed by a massive tsunami causing devastating damage and casualties.

The quake and tsunami struck the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Station consisting of six nuclear reactors. Fukushima Dai-ichi itself could barely sustain the jolts. The tsunami waves reached over 15 meters high, destroying all the emergency diesel power generators, power distribution panels, and motors of the seawater cooling pumps. The external power supply was cut because of the jolts, disabling emergency generators. The nuclear reactors were rendered totally without electricity.

In coping with nuclear reactor accidents, there are three iron clad rules:

- Stop it;
- Cool it, and finally
- Contain it.

TEPCO managed to stop the reactors, but to cool down the reactors and the pool of spent fuel, it had to pour in raw seawater. Some iodine 131 and cesium 137 leaked out.

The Chernobyl accident involved nuclear reactors of different types, and they were managed by the Soviet Communist regime without containment covers around the pressure vessels. In comparison, Japanese nuclear reactors had enjoyed an excellent reputation for safety.

At the moment of this writing, the nuclear reactors are in cold shutdown, but the melted reactor cores have been left untouched at the bottom of the containment structures, and the quantity of radioactive contaminated water is increasing because cooling water has to be pumped into the reactors and circulated.

While Units 1-4 units will be scrapped, the process could take several decades. More than 100,000 people were exposed to radioactivity or had to evacuate the affected areas. Decontamination could take much time and work.

We shall never allow a recurrence of this sort of nuclear accident. If one ever does occur, we must keep radioactive contamination to the minimum. To that



Amb. Tetsuya Endo

end, we need to thoroughly assess accidents in order to dig into their causes, direct or indirect, and contemplate countermeasures.

Various investigation commissions were set up, mainly by the Japanese government and the Diet. Although these commissions have a very powerful mandate, there have been concerns about how effectively they can pursue facts and truth involving government responsibilities and liabilities. That was why a private, Independent Investigation Commission was set up, away from all influences or vested interests. I participated in this commission, which interviewed over 300 individuals concerned including former Prime Minister Naoto Kan. Following a six-month investigation, we submitted the results at the end of February 2012.

The Fukushima tragedy was caused by the earthquake and tsunami, but it was aggravated by human failures. History entertains no “ifs,” but let me challenge that assumption:

- If Japan’s utilities and government had paid attention to outside advice,
- if the nuclear power plants and equipment had been properly designed and laid out, and
- if adequate preparations had been made against severe accidents,
- then we might have avoided a major accident like this latest one, or at least we could have significantly contained the damages.

Fukushima nuclear power plant



MAIN LESSONS

- The regulatory authorities, power utilities, local residents, and the public subscribed to the myth of “absolute safety,” hampering debates on a possible accident. Preventive trainings were rather cosmetic, as TEPCO and government agencies indulged in collective complacency towards accidents.
- There was virtually a closed community among industry, bureaucrats, politicians, and media professionals. The state authorities determine nuclear policies and the utilities apply them, blurring responsibilities and liabilities for safety regulation.
- Japan’s nuclear safety regulatory system was isolated from international standards; meanwhile, the regulatory agencies lacked the capabilities and expertise to implement the regulations.

Many people in the nuclear circle realized the adverse effects of the compartmentalized bureaucracy as well as the perfunctory test regime, but they apparently refrained from raising issues. They overlooked or took lightly the International Atomic Energy Agency’s recommendations and international advice.

Our challenges include clarifying our lessons on both domestic and international dimensions by means of thorough investigation into the accident as well as promptly applying these lessons. We should produce

a road map for the medium to long term. In this regard, it was indeed welcome news that safety regulations and the promotion of nuclear energy are finally to be dealt with separately, adhering to advice from abroad.

People's good faith in nuclear energy has been greatly reduced, while trust in public authorities and the electric companies has fallen to a rock-bottom low. It will require a long time and sincere efforts to regain it. In a democratic nation, nuclear energy cannot be sustained without popular trust and support. At the same time, people should deal with matters related to energy and atomic power in a more reasonable and cool-headed fashion.



UPF-UK forum on genocide

GENOCIDE CONCERNS ADDRESSED IN LONDON

By Robin Marsh, UPF-UK

"We do not know how many geniuses were lost in genocides," lamented Rev. Dr. Marcus Braybrooke, calling each "a real person" with a family and relatives. The President of the World Congress of Faiths was addressing a genocide awareness program in the House of Lords in London on January 23, 2013.

Several themes emerged: the guilt of the survivors, the therapeutic benefit for victims of speaking out and working to prevent future suffering, the lack of righteous will to recognize and challenge patterns of genocidal development, and anguish over ongoing genocides.

Charlotte Simon spoke of the ongoing tragedy in her native eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where more than 10 million people have died in the last 40 years in the greed to exploit its mineral wealth. Congolese people loved life and welcomed people to their nation, but their trust has been abused. This abuse continues as invading militia supported by neighboring nations terrorize communities. It is said that on average 1152 rapes are reported each day in eastern DRC.

The CEO of Freedom from Torture, Keith Best, described torture as a dehumanizing activity that leaves psychological scars. He explained that victims need special care that is rarely available. Philomene Uwamaliya, a survivor of such atrocities, cautioned that "time does not heal all wounds." She said she channels

her anger into constructive use both by speaking out and by helping other victims.

Edwin Shuker, Vice President of the Sephardic Congress and President of Justice for Jews of Arab Countries, emphasized the need to prevent systematic persecution, ostracism, legitimization of cruelty, and denial of wrongdoing. Zara Mohammed described the genocide suffered by the Kurds. In her hometown, the men and boys were taken away and never seen again; 20,000 Kurdish youth have disappeared.

Ruth Barnett, a Holocaust and genocide educator, referred to the Armenian genocide in the early 20th century. The killing grounds and mass graves have not been identified, and thus there is no closure for the relatives of those who were killed. She was among the 10,000 Jewish children from Germany and central Europe who were placed in British foster homes, hostels, and farms before the outbreak of World War II; often they were the only members of their families who survived the Holocaust.

She also spoke of the Roma Community, who lost more than a million people in the Holocaust, alongside the European Jewish community. Pointing to Gregory Stanton's analysis of the "Path to Genocide," she explained that the Nazis had stigmatized both the Jews and the Roma before legitimizing violence against members of those communities.

The Holocaust was described as the culmination of a series of social, cultural, and political developments. The UN designated January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day. UPF-UK holds an annual observance to promote awareness of the process leading to genocide in the hope of preventing recurrences.

UN COMMEMORATIVE DAYS

By UPF International

Argentina: Volunteer Day

UPF-Argentina awarded prizes for its second annual Volunteering and the Common Good contest on December 5. Prizes were presented for outstanding volunteer work in the following categories: education, art and culture, integration of people with disabilities, spirituality and self help, health and wholeness, communication, environment and ecology, children, elderly, and sports and recreation.



ARGENTINA

Czech Republic: Human Rights Day

UPF-Czech Republic held a conference at the European House in Prague on December 12.



CZECH REPUBLIC

Estonia: Day of Tolerance

A presentation about tolerance took place on November 16 in Kose. One of the English language teachers invited UPF representatives to give a presentation to the pupils from the 10th through the 12th grades.



ESTONIA

Georgia: United Nations Day

An October 25 conference on Empowering Youth Leaders to Combat HIV/AIDS related to the UN's Millennium Development Goal to "Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases." Some 40 civic leaders, representatives of NGOs, and youth activists gathered at the United Nations office in Tbilisi to discuss ways to halt the spread of HIV.



GEORGIA

Peru: Human Rights Day

UPF-Peru organized a commemoration of Human Rights Day in the Peruvian Congress on December 7, co-sponsored by



PERU

Congressman Dr. Yonhy Lescano Ancieta. The hall was full of interested people, including many religious leaders and representatives of civil society. Speakers included Lic. Isabel Rodriguez, Arq. Luis Huarcaya, and Pastor Luis Acero.

**Russia:
International
Solidarity Day**

UPF-Moscow’s final forum of the year, on December 20, highlighted various approaches to building solidarity among people, including volunteering, the arts, and poetry. Emelyanov Valery Mikhailovich, president of “The Time and the World,” emphasized the religious dimension: “It is essential for all of us to have a permanent and eternal common goal,” he said. “Based on this, we can be united around our creator.”



RUSSIA

**Tajikistan:
International
Children’s Day**

A representative of UPF-Tajikistan, F. Beringov, together with the Children’s Public Center of Professional Orientation, organized a series of lessons and an exhibition of children’s creative talents on November 20 at a center for homeless children in Dushanbe.



TAJIKISTAN

**Zambia:
Holocaust
Remembrance Day**

The United Nations Information Centre in Lusaka hosted a commemoration on January 25. A video clip about the Holocaust and the Rwanda genocide was shown. A rabbi offered a Kaddish prayer followed by a candlelight service in which each participant held a candle in memory of those who died, resolving to prevent such tragedies from happening again. UPF-Zambia Secretary General Rev. Rudolf Faerber prayed for the unity of all races and implored that a tragedy such as the Holocaust would never happen again.



ZAMBIA



At an orphanage and monastery in Banepa, Nepal, youth spread the message of love, humanitarian concern, and peace.

BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS IN NEPAL

Almost 50 volunteers came from different religions, languages, and cultures in Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Eurasia to participate in a Religious Youth Service (RYS) project at the Metta Center orphanage and monastery in Banepa, in the Kavre District of Nepal. From December 2-9, 2012, participants helped spread the message of love, humanitarian concern and peace through community-based service, education in values, leadership training, interfaith visits and dialogues, and cross-cultural learning experiences.

Participants helped renovate the orphanage and built a wall at the nearby Buddhist monastery, a key spiritual, social, and educational center for the people of Banepa and the nearby capital, Kathmandu. Religious experts, educators, scholars, and development practitioners delivered high-quality presentations on building peace, creating strong relationships among religious groups, concepts of different religions regarding peace, and strategic solutions for issues facing Nepal. All participants were able to visit different religious holy places, including a Buddhist monastery, Hindu temples, a mosque, and a church. During these visits religious leaders shared about

the history of religion in Nepal and peace-building strategies among the religious groups in Nepal that promote harmony, love, and humanitarian concern.

In the closing ceremony, more than one hundred people were invited from all walks of life, including politicians, government officials, lawyers,

religious leaders, development workers, and educators. Most Venerable Ashwaghosha Maha Thero praised the idea of building friendship through service; he emphasized talking less and working more. Representatives from the various countries presented a multicultural program. Participants from Russia, Egypt, Spain, Pakistan, and Bangladesh offered songs in their language and the Pakistanis presented their national anthem and a cultural dance.

Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal, Minister of Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation of the Government of Nepal, thanked participants for coming from so many nations, and he promised ongoing support for the orphanage.

RELIGIOUS YOUTH SERVICE LAUNCHED IN PAKISTAN

Eighty youth leaders, including staff, volunteers, and participants from all provinces of Pakistan, assembled in Multan, Punjab Province, to spend time as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural community for the launch of the Religious Youth Service in Pakistan. From October 12-19, 2012, the youth leaders engaged in service-learning activities including visiting religious sites and working to provide both a safe drinking water system and toilets for the Hindu slum dwellers in Multan. This first RYS project in Pakistan offered education, training, and opportunities for participants to develop their capacities as peace builders through learning and sharing.

The introductory session included prayers and recitations from the holy books of Muslims, Christians, and Hindus. Mr. Marcus Younas, Executive Director of SEAP-Pakistan and project organizer, gave an introduction to RYS, and Mr. Piya Ratna, head of RYS-Nepal, described UPF's interfaith work around the world.

Mr. Irfan Ali talked about the need for social justice: "Only by changing people's ways of thinking can we empower the marginalized communities in



Russian and Nepali youth build friendships.

Pakistan,” he said. To stimulate discussion of interfaith harmony and peace Mr. Ayub Sajid and Mr. Robindar Singh shared about their trials and tribulations in their struggle to restore peace and harmony. Mr. Sajid then facilitated a dialogue among the religiously diverse youth and encouraged them to share how their traditions inspire them to serve and to partner in projects that improve their communities. The focus was on “dialogue and service” in an atmosphere of trust and cooperative creativity.

Participants spent a day with children at the Salvation Army School of Shanti Naga, where Mr. Ahmad Faraz, Field Coordinator of the Funkor Child Art Centre in Islamabad, with the collaboration of Asian Network of Trust in Hiroshima, Japan, taught students about protecting the environment and promoting tolerance and peace.

The schedule included a tour of the famous shrine of Shah Shams Tabrez and a group discussion led by Makhdom Syed Tariq Abbass Shamsi (Naib Matwali of the Tomb). Participants visited other religious sites, including the Roman Catholic Church of Khanewal City and the Christian village of Shanti Nagar. At the nearby Hindu temple they learned about the Hindu faith from one of the participants, Mr. Preetam Dass. For most of the youth leaders, it was their first visit to a Hindu temple, and they cleaned the temple to show solidarity with their Hindu brothers and sisters.

In the slum community, participants built two toilets and set up a drinking water supply system. Most of them until this time had never picked up a brick or touched a mason’s tool. Enduring the intense heat of 40 degrees Celsius, the participants worked alongside skilled laborers.

Religious scholars described Multan as *Madina tul Aulia* (Land of the Saints) and home to numerous holy teachers who spread messages of religious tolerance, ethics, love, and peace without any discrimination based on caste or faith. Mohson Shaheen, Coordinator of Jamat Islami, addressed participants on themes of promoting tolerance, peacebuilding, social harmony, and social justice.

The youth leaders participated in a Student Peace Festival where students from different educational institutions were invited to give cultural presentations including dramas, songs, speeches, and poster displays. More than 150 students participated, and they were encouraged to recommend ways to counter extremism.

Participants joined other young people in Pakistan and other parts of the world in holding a candlelight prayer vigil for the recovery of Malala Yousuf Zai, the 14-year-old Pakistani student who was shot in the head and neck on October 9 as she was returning from school, defying a Taliban ban on education for girls. RYS-Pakistan participants expressed strong condemnation for the act of violence and asked that the President and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan take action.



A candlelight vigil for Malala Yousuf Zai, a Pakistani student shot as she was returning from school, defying a Taliban ban on education for girls.

At the end, youth leaders from various traditions shared their reflections:

FAHEEM IQBAL SHAMSI (MUSLIM): I am greatly inspired by this event. It was a good opportunity for me to learn from participants of different religions and especially to take part in the service component of the activity. It is possible to live together with people of other faiths.

ASHOK KUMAR (HINDU): It was an excellent training. The exposure visit to Shanti Nagar, the church, and the shrine to the Muslim saint and especially the service work were a marvelous initiative.

SHAMS NAVEED (CHRISTIAN): The training on peacebuilding and all the sessions were very good. The session on interfaith harmony was very good.



In the ongoing process of helping the government and people of Sri Lanka reconcile communities and heal the wounds of civil war, Religious Youth Service organized a project in a northwestern Sri Lanka village where Muslim civilians found safe haven during the civil war. The 40 participants and staff from five religious traditions spent the week of December 15-21 in Kalpitiya and Mahawewa working with local villagers and skilled workers to build a new community center and do other educational activities.

The Role of the Media in a Pluralistic World

By Bogdan Pammer, Youth UPF Europe

On December 11, 2012, a forum in advance of an upcoming UN Alliance of Civilizations Forum in Vienna explored “The Role of the Media in a Pluralistic World.” The following questions were discussed:

- Is there a global media society?
- Should opinions which disturb the public order be restricted?
- Is social media a waste of time or a tool for democracy?

In considering the existence of a global media society we have to ask: Does the Internet or the digitalization of communications make people more active citizens? Is the digital citizen a global citizen?

It is clear that the Internet has given people a chance to have their voice heard on a larger platform than ever before. Anyone now has the ability to share their voice with the rest of the world in a quick and effective way. Before, news would be limited through designated media outlets and the slow and controlled regimentation of newspapers and other forms of traditional media. Now, with the advent of technology, anyone can report on an issue or highlight a concern. This ability has made local news world news and has in many ways blurred the lines of citizenship; for the first

time, the concept of a global citizen is becoming more than just a dream.

Since anyone can report on an issue, the topic of censorship is more relevant now than ever. Before, media outlets would pick and choose what to publish. Depending on the leadership of the media outlet, the censorship laws, and the cultural and political climate of a country, certain news would never be reported or shared with the public. The Internet has changed the ability of a select few groups of people to control the sharing of information. Surely this has been a positive aspect of the digitalization of communications, but is there a danger to such freedom without restraint or responsibility? Should opinions which disturb the public order be restricted? Free speech does not mean that you are allowed to yell “fire” in a crowded movie theater without reason. Should such rules apply to the Internet as well? The difficulty is in determining who decides what constitutes disturbing the public order and if that disturbance is a greater threat than the right to free speech. The Internet gives a voice to the minority and to those who might be voiceless in other traditional forms of communication. The Internet can also be a place that breeds hate and fear through people who use the ease and anonymity of the Internet irresponsibly.

The opportunities to interact in the digital age are huge, but the quality and effect of those interactions can



Youth delegates at a forum in Vienna.



vary in impact and importance. How will digital citizens transform democracy? Do social media just create the illusion of political activism? Are we politically active and contributing substantially to the development of our community and society by posting items through social media channels?

Harald Katzmaier and Harald Mahrer in their book *Die Formel der Macht (The Formula of Power)* emphasized that social networks often leave an illusion of power, since people utilizing those networks do not necessarily have the critical resources necessary to turn their “circles” and “friends” into influence but can still feel like they are doing something by posting an article on a blog or emailing a post to friends. It is obvious that an increased amount of time spent in front of screens will not necessarily help people learn to go beyond the borders and boxes they live in. Those screens might even tempt them to rather stay in their zone of comfort than to step out of it. The New York Times picked up this issue in its “Global Agenda” series in which Susan Greenfield expresses her concerns not only about the time spent in front of screens but also the fundamentally different role new media claim in our lives:

The current technologies have been converted from means into ends. Instead of complementing or supplementing or enriching life in three dimensions, an alternative life in just two dimensions — stimulating only hearing and vision — seems to have become an end in and of itself.

Although it is clear that the digitalization of communication has many benefits, does it also have fundamental drawbacks? Does having the ability to communicate so freely about issues that concern us, whether by “liking” something on facebook, tweeting about it, or putting it on blogs, replace the need that people feel to do something substantive in the real world? Clearly using digital communication to highlight social

issues and injustice cannot be bad, but if it replaces the urge for people to act in the real world it is dangerous. How many times has someone written about an injustice on facebook and that is where the action ended? It might be good to write about the plight of a homeless family, but where is the good if that homeless family is not also helped with food or money or shelter? Awareness of social issues might be growing but is substantive action also growing?

We live in an age where technology is exponentially growing but where the fundamental questions of right and wrong remain the same. Evgeny Morozov emphasizes that the Internet and the social media of today were essentially shaped by “a political economy and various market conditions.” Facebook and company make their users like, view, and post stuff in order to learn about them and increase their advertising value. In-depth understanding and informed decisions are not in their primary interest. It is up to people to figure out how and why to use technology.

In February 2013, 150 youth leaders from around the world will come to Vienna for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations forum that will address the universal right to religious freedom and promoting a new religious pluralism through education; media pluralism and the diversity of media content and their contribution to fostering public debate, democracy and awareness of diverse opinions; and shaping a new narrative for migration, integration, and mobility in the global economy.

In this digital age, the young leaders and activists who are at the forefront of technological development have an advantage when helping to create a responsible culture of peace that goes beyond borders.



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