

UPF Commemorates 21st Anniversary of International Year of the Family

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New York, New York—UPF and the Women’s Federation for World Peace International (WFWPI) collaborated to sponsor a forum called, “Raising Children of Peace,” in commemoration of the 21st anniversary of the UN’s International Year of the Family, at the ONE UN New York on November 4, 2015.

Sixty guests, including UN officials, diplomats, NGO leaders, a political leader, scholars and students, as well as medical and business professionals, attended the event.

The forum, which featured two sessions, was opened by Mrs. Lynn Walsh, director of UPF’s Office for Marriage and Family, who gave the welcoming remarks. Mr. Taj Hamad, UPF secretary general, introduced the speakers, H.E. Denis Antoine, Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Grenada to the UN, and H.E. Mrs. U. Joy Ogwu, Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the UN.

Amb. Antoine shared research, news and stories about raising children of peace, beginning from early childhood. He encouraged everyone to reflect back on their own childhood and how it shaped who they are today. “Look at yourself, the things that molded you, the things that motivated you, what made you laugh, and what made you cry.”

Amb. Ogwu added to the conversation, quoting scripture from Proverbs 22:6: “Raise a child in the way he should go. When he grows he will not depart from it.” She shared her experience growing up and the principles her mother passed on to her, which established peace in her mind and have influenced her life. “When you have peace, you are at peace,” she said. “You have the majesty of calmness all around you, and you radiate it to others. That is what I try to pass on to my own children. They know that there is a fundamental principle in the house, that there are limits, and that you can’t bear grudges.”

For the keynote session, the meeting room was turned into a living room with two armchairs at the front, which allowed the speakers to engage in a discussion on the forum theme, as well as draw the guests into the conversation. Mrs. Alexa Ward, deputy director of WFWPI’s UN Office, introduced the two main speakers, Dr. James Leckman and Dr. Rima Salah, who spoke about the key role that child development and parenting play in building and maintaining healthy families as the basis for lasting peace in the world.

Dr. Leckman is the Neison Harris professor of Child Psychiatry, Psychiatry, Psychology, and Pediatrics at Yale University. He is a well-known child psychiatrist and patient-oriented clinical investigator. For more than 20 years, he served as the director of the Child Study Center at Yale. Dr. Leckman referred to a number of projects around the world as well as recent discoveries in biology and genetics that give evidence to the importance of parenting in the role of child development.

Through his efforts to bring together scientists and experts in child development and parenting, he was determined to answer the question of, “If we brought people together to talk about children and parenting interventions, would we actually make a difference in terms of a peaceful world?”

He outlined studies involving the Mother-Child Education Foundation and other research groups who examined parent responsiveness to their children in their early years of development. These ventures continued to involve a growing network of scientists, psychologists and parents who are committed to studying the effects of parent responsiveness on the development of healthy children, families and communities. Dr. Leckman shared several of these findings with the group.



Dr. Rima Salah, a member of the UN Secretary General’s High-Level Panel on Peace Operations, then spoke about the need to turn this clinical evidence into policies, which could be adopted by the UN, as well as by governments around the world, and thereby substantially build healthy, strong and peaceful families. Dr. Salah had a distinguished career with UNICEF over a period of 21 years in which she held positions in Pakistan, Burkina Faso, Vietnam, and Chad. She completed her career with UNICEF as deputy executive director in New York. Dr. Salah is currently a faculty member of the Child Study Center at Yale.

She began her presentation with the question, “How can we link early childhood development and peace-building?” She then shared about the UN sustainable development goals that emerged from meetings with researchers and policy-makers, and listed those who had already begun to adopt them in their organizations. “This was a triumph that was hailed by civil societies,” she said. “We are also mobilizing ‘Friends of Early Childhood Education,’ a group of UN Ambassadors who can build a resolution saying that children and families are agents of peace.”

Dr. Leckman and Dr. Salah co-authored a book, *Pathways to Peace: the Transformative Power of Children and Families*, along with Dr. Catherine Panter-Brick, professor of Anthropology, Health and Global Affairs at Yale, which was the basis for the speakers’ presentations.

