

## UPF-Bangladesh: A Circle of Light: Moving Through and Beyond the Coronavirus

Binod Dangi  
June 12, 2020



Bangladesh -- UPF-Bangladesh successfully held a "Peace Talks" Zoom meeting on the theme "A Circle of Light: Moving Through and Beyond the Coronavirus Crisis." This took place on Friday, June 12, 2020 at 10:00 am. Its 25 participants included members of Parliament, religious leaders, academicians, government officials and Ambassadors for Peace.

The program started with warm greetings and introductions from the moderator, Rev. Santosh Kumar Paudel, director of UPF-South Asia.

Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal, former minister of the Government of Nepal and chairman of UPF-Asia Pacific, gave keynote remarks. He mentioned that UPF is encouraging all leaders from different sectors of the nation to unite in order to encourage cooperation, dialogue and compassion during this pandemic, so that we can overcome the momentous challenge of Covid-19. Honorable Dhakal introduced the upcoming Asia Pacific Summit webinar and invited everyone.

Hon. Kazi Firoj Rashid, former minister and member of the Parliament of Bangladesh, opened by saying that Bangladesh has been fighting with the novel coronavirus for about three months. People are being challenged to fight this unseen enemy, and thousands are dying. It is as if we are powerless; we need to turn to our faith in God at these times. Leaders need to protect their people from the virus, provide much-needed food supplies, secure financial assistance against hardships faced by the jobless, and help make modern medical facilities available when needed. Opening industries, large and small, however, should also be given high priority.

Mehreen Mahmud, president of the Bangladesh chapter of the Women's Federation for World Peace, expressed her gratitude for the gathering. Covid, she said, is not just a crisis but is the first peace initiative Mother Nature has offered us in our lifetime. Her remarks follow:

It is time to pause, listen, understand, and move on in the way we should, the way Nature expects us to. Let this teaching teach us what true parenting is all about. Let us not go astray anymore. Let this messiah guide us to a peaceful existence where my life, faith, property, belief, shelter, territory, even relationships, will not be prey to someone's greedy eyes. May we all figure out where peace lies.

May we begin again, to fathom the value of true love, family, in the touch of a finger, in daily bread, in a breath of oxygen that is given us at no cost, sunshine, an overflowing abundance of love that gives birth and unchains humanity. Let me, myself and I become human for MY fellows, not even thinking to harm anyone.

What we are calling "crisis" is actually "the light." "The beacon." The light that is showing us the value of love and peace and guiding us to become a better "us": Worthy of the name Human. Once we all become good souls, fair trade will commence on its own, wars will cease, and economic emancipation will appear at our doorsteps when we are holding each other's hand. Stock markets will show unprecedented rise just because people will show the power of being together in harmony.

Hence, the circle of light is within us. It will be ignited through these perilous times. We'll see our brethren suffer, and we will suffer same inside. We will burn with love for others; we will die or almost die or come out safe or succumb to destiny's desire, come what may. But survival must ensure a future of

peace and dignity evolving from myself, reaching on to you, my brethren.

Let us embrace this opportunity of purification given us in the form of a meager virus and not one big hurricane or earthquake or deluge to wipe out humanity. Let humanity see the chance given to get its self-respect back over the dolphin or the coral or the baobab trees, start thinking well of others, for Heaven's sake, and treasure the peace already given us all around.



Prof. Dr. M Shamsheer Ali, president, UPF-Bangladesh and founding vice-chancellor, Bangladesh Open University and Southeast University, started by thanking UPF for organizing the meeting and expressed his heartfelt good wishes for the excellencies and the distinguished colleagues present at the Zoom conference.

He then gave a brief introduction to the scientific structure of the virus and mentioned that this tiniest object is not only very beautiful but also very powerful. To the physicist, the outer shell of the virus presents twofold, threefold and fivefold symmetries. The immunity of the human body can on most occasions win over the virus; the problem arises when the immunity is lowered, for example in older adults and in people with other health problems. Scientists and medical practitioners were not really prepared to cope with the virus firstly because not everything about the virus was known to them and secondly because of the lack of sufficient infrastructural facilities even in developed countries. When the crisis will hopefully be over, the first thing that most countries would have to address is a complete reshaping of the health care system. Many have already started the process. But for the time being we have to forget everything and concentrate on saving people. This is where the UPF philosophy can provide encouragement to all. Human capital is the best of all capital, and, therefore, all nations have to pool their wisdom and resources in overcoming the global crisis.

Professor Ali then pointed out that the virus has also brought some urgent messages for humankind. In this connection, he read aloud a small note (reproduced below) on the coronavirus that he prepared while brooding over the pandemic.



#### **A Note on the Coronavirus**

*The havoc apart, the coronavirus is doing what world leaders could not do for decades.*

*A nanometer-sized beautiful but deadly coronavirus named after its crownlike appearance consisting of protein spikes protruding out of its shell has rocked the world and wrought a havoc unprecedented in the modern history of humankind. The virus has already mutated into a few strains as it has been traveling all over the world. Scientists are studying all aspects of this virus*

*and are trying to find out a defense mechanism. A vaccine is yet to be in place for public use. The wearing of masks, frequent washing of hands and "distancing" are now the main prescriptions. People are remaining indoors. Now is the time to brood over many things. One such thing is the power of the invisible virus and the lessons it has begun to teach us. Apart from the damage it has been causing in terms of death and depletion of resources, it is doing what the politicians of the world could not do for decades. Politicians sat and debated at Rio, Cancun, Tokyo and at other places over biodiversity, global warming and climate change. They could not reach a decision on the necessity of reducing carbon dioxide within a certain period of time. Even if they did to some extent, the decisions were either shelved or the actions were slow in coming.*

*But what has the nanovirus done? It has forced the people to send their cars into the garage. Carbon emission has been decreasing; air and water quality has started improving. Dolphins (having a brain size nearest to that of man) have been dancing in the Bay of Bengal, sparrows and starlings have been arriving in gardens, wildlife is becoming visible. Nature has started healing.*

*Man has been designated as the vice-regent of God on Earth, and as such he was ordained to do the "caring" for other forms of life (more than thirty million of them). Man did not. He has been always on the run---meeting and chasing people for increasing his wealth and property and for enlarging his sphere of influence in society. He has not been giving adequate time to his family members, relatives, friends and neighbors. Moreover, his actions have been rampant. He has denuded forests and sent many wild species to the verge of extinction; he has grabbed water bodies and destroyed greenery. Is it not time for him to think that he should have chosen another lifestyle that would be environmentally friendly and sustainable in the actual sense of the term he is using without really understanding it? He can choose it even now.*

*Man will hopefully tide over the crisis sooner or later. He would heal one day. But would he care to ensure that Nature also continues to heal? Would he really?*

*Finally, Professor Ali mentioned that it is the peace of "all nations" that is at the heart of UPF. We have to look after the safety and security of all people, no matter where they are on the planet, irrespective of caste, color and creed. In this connection he mentioned a statement of the seventeenth-century mystic poet John Donne, wherein he expressed the ideal of the human family in the following words:*

*No man is an island, entire of itself; every man  
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;  
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe  
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as  
well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine  
own were; any man's death diminishes me,  
because I am involved in mankind.  
And therefore never send to know for whom  
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.*

*"May God help us in saving the Family of Man," he concluded.*

The Zoom meeting ended with everyone exchanging greetings and expressing heartfelt congratulations to all participants.