

IAPD-Asia Pacific Webinar Discusses Role of Faith-based Organizations

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Bangkok, Thailand -- With the upsurge of modernization brought by technological advances in the 21st century, humanity is gradually losing sight of the wisdom found in spirituality. Moreover, a significant number of the greatest conflicts in history were brought about by differences in faith and religion. With this in mind, UPF-Asia Pacific and the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) convened a webinar on December 12, 2020 for faith leaders to come together and discuss ways to achieve a unified world of peace.

A total of 12,734 internet viewers from 35 nations in the Asia Pacific region participated in the two-hour online event, whose theme was "The Role of Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) in Building a Heavenly Unified World." Eleven guest speakers from different faith organizations called on everybody to unite in order to provide solutions to the problems faced in society in these trying times.

Pres. Demian Dunkley, co-chair of UPF-Asia Pacific-1, spoke about the urgent need for religions and faith organizations to set aside their differences in order to attain a world of peace.

Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal, chairman of UPF-Asia Pacific, said that it is part of human nature to seek for a community with a higher purpose provided by faith. He remarked that this is the reason why faith-based organizations play an important role in supporting people in times of crises.

Dr. Tageldin Hamad, vice president of UPF International and international coordinator of the IAPD, underscored that interreligious dialogues should develop into partnerships and collaboration with the government and other stakeholders of society. He said that it is high time for the IAPD to aid people of different faiths towards unity, togetherness and love -- "the ultimate vaccine for all ills."

Mrs. Ursula McLackland, secretary general of UPF-Asia Pacific, delivered a presentation on the "Programs of IAPD-Asia Pacific" highlighting all the events and activities the IAPD convened in this region since its inauguration in 2017.

Ven. Sobitha, president of the International Buddhist Education Center, Myanmar, shared his insights based on the Buddhist perspective. He emphasized the importance of cultivating common values and universal ethics in order to develop confidence, tolerance and harmony to avoid religious conflicts. Just like the Buddha welcomed all faiths, a peaceful discussion and exchange of different views on spiritual practice and liberation should be encouraged.

Rev. Edgardo C. de Jesus, Ph.D., parish priest of the Archdiocese of Bulacan, from the Philippines, focused on the Roman Catholic perspective. He shared that in his encounter with other religions he was bestowed with three gifts: understanding, enlightenment and prudence.

Dr. Tong Yun Kai, president of the Hong Kong Confucian Academy, China, spoke about the importance of self-control and benevolence towards others as the main teachings of Confucius, as they advocate moderation of human desire and cultivate respect for oneself and others. This should be applied first in the family and then extended to our society and nation.

Vachan Praveen Pundit Shree Deen Bandhu Pokhrel, a renowned Hindu spiritual leader from Nepal, underscored that the role of all faith-based institutions is to create an environment for their devotees and

followers to live in cosmopolitanism, companionship and cooperation. Hence, faith-based organizations must think in that way and act accordingly to create a heavenly integrated world.



Dr. Amir Farid Isahak, chairman of the Interfaith Spiritual Fellowship, Malaysia, shared the Muslim perspective by saying that Islam teaches to respect others who are different from us and who have chosen other religions. The Prophet Muhammad said, "No one is a true believer until he loves all of humanity, all of creation." Therefore, disagreements should be resolved in amicable and nonviolent ways.

Mr. Fouad Sobbi, president of the Mandaean World Congress, Australia, thanked religious leaders for strengthening peace and love among people around the world. He commended UPF's founders, Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, for their undying efforts and initiatives to connect different faiths and religions.

Dr. Charanjit Kaur, assistant professor at the Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia, highlighted the central principles of Sikhism, which are selflessness and a willingness to serve others. These basic values enable people to unite and live harmoniously, reduce inequality and preserve a nonviolent atmosphere.

Rev. Masaichi Hori, co-chair of UPF-Asia Pacific-2, emphasized the importance of religions to recognize the existence of one common God, who is also our parent. Just like young children sometimes quarrel with each other and resolve their problems by recognizing that they came from one parent, religions around the world should also resolve conflicts by recognizing their common root in God.

Dr. Robert Kittel, co-chair of UPF-Asia Pacific, moderated the webinar, and Dr. Venus Agustin, vice chairman of UPF-Asia Pacific, conducted the question and answer session at the end of the program.

