

UPF France Paris Meeting Addresses Human Rights and Responsibility

Gilles Kalafate

December 13, 2025

Secretary General, UPF France



Paris, France – At UPF headquarters in Paris, UPF-France and the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) held a meeting on December, 13, 2025, to commemorate the 77th anniversary of Human Rights Day, under the theme, "Human Rights and Our Responsibility."

The two organizations, both holding general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), also marked the close of a symbolic year, celebrating both the 80th anniversary of the United Nations and the 20th anniversary of UPF. To conclude the event, several participants received Peace Ambassador certificates.



Before a packed room of guests from diverse cultures and nationalities, **Ms. Brigitte Wada**, president of FFWPU-France and moderator of the meeting, welcomed the participants before giving the floor to the four speakers.

Mr. Jacques Marion, president of UPF-France, addressed the contemporary conception of human rights, highlighting the often-neglected importance of duties, responsibility, and fraternity. While liberty and equality are widely claimed as rights, he emphasized, fraternity is too often neglected because it is primarily a duty. He reminded the audience that an exclusive focus on rights claims leads societies to lose sight of personal ethics and spirituality.



He then discussed the creation of the United Nations in the context of the Cold War, a period marked by the marginalization of the spiritual in favor of the political and legal. He recalled the warning by Dag Hammarskjöld, the second UN secretary-general, about the need for a spiritual renaissance to preserve civilization. He also highlighted UPF's founders advocacy for the integration of an interfaith council within the United Nations, to better address contemporary conflicts, often marked by religious or ethnic dimensions. Finally, he raised concerns about the worrying decline of religious freedoms in Asia, particularly in South Korea, where some religious leaders are persecuted, even imprisoned, because of their political stances.



Mr. Driss Senda, president of UPF-Congo-Brazzaville, then addressed the challenge of peace in the face of modern complexities. He described a major historical transition, characterized by the relative decline of Western dominance in favor of East Asia, leading to the erosion of the international order based on dialogue and law. This pivotal period, he explained, creates a geopolitical "gray zone" in which intimidation tends to replace dialogue, while the explosion of military budgets calls into question the very credibility of the ideal of peace.

In a globalized world where no power can now impose its will unilaterally, he emphasized that UPF and its ambassadors for peace have a mission to act as "beacons of light" in the face of authoritarian tendencies and identity-based isolationism. He concluded by highlighting the fundamental role of culture and creativity, capable of healing the fractures of history and building bridges between peoples.



Ms. Marie-Claude Machon-Honoré, BPW International's representative to UNESCO and former chair of the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee, highlighted UNESCO's role and the importance of education and art as vehicles for resistance and peace. She emphasized that no lasting peace is possible without the full and complete inclusion of women, who bring skills, perspectives, and community networks essential to the resilience and reconstruction of post-conflict societies.

In this context, art emerges as a fundamental lever for resistance, healing, and reconstruction, she said. She offered examples to illustrate this: in Gaza, traditional dance helps preserve dignity and cultural identity; in Mexico, dance becomes an act of silent resistance against oppression; and on Jeju Island, South Korea, drawing and painting serve to release collective traumatic memories and initiate a process of community healing.

Finally, **Ms. Carolyn Handschin**, president of WFWP Europe, presented the "No Peace Without Women" initiative, born out of the urgency and emotion sparked by the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This initiative is based on the conviction that conflicts are not inevitable and that their prevention requires the mobilization of all active forces in society, particularly women.

The initiative aims to bring together political and institutional decision-makers and to amplify the voices of women in civil society within peace and security processes. It builds upon a historical tradition demonstrating the crucial impact of women in conflict resolution and reconstruction, as exemplified by the Liberian women's movement that contributed to achieving peace in 2003. Driven by an instinct to protect children and communities, this mobilization of women constitutes a powerful lever for building lasting peace, she explained.

The afternoon concluded with a question and answer session, followed by the appointment of fourteen new ambassadors for peace, and then a friendly afternoon tea, during which participants were able to create or deepen ties, and outline joint projects for the coming year.