

UPF Madrid, Spain Holds Tribute to All Victims in Israel and Gaza

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Madrid, Spain - As the world witnesses the suffering, pain, hardship and extreme conditions in Gaza and Israel, UPF-Spain held an event on December 14, 2023, in tribute to all the victims in this war, be they Arabs or Israelis. It was an immense challenge to bring together Arabs and Jews in one room, at a time when the two groups are at war.

With UPF's years of experience working with the Palestinian Embassy, and with Palestinian and Arab writers, university professors, artists and musicians, we were surprised that at first Arabs refused to be in the same room with Jews, who were more open to the idea. After many pleadings both sides accepted. As organizers, we set the conditions that there should be no verbal attacks on the state of Israel, no mention of terrorist Zionism and no comments that would be deemed hurtful by either side.

For many years members of the Jewish community in our area, as well as other friends from different walks of life, have been guests at the UPF Cultural Center. We invited representatives from each group, on the understanding that there would be no talk about politics.

The main speaker and peace mediator at the program was Father Angel Garcia Rodriguez, founder of Messengers of Peace, who is known to all Spaniards for his charitable work in disaster and war zones, and

is a recipient of the highest national honors.

Also in attendance was Ms. Yael Cobano, director of the Reformed Jewish Synagogue of Madrid. She and her community have worked very closely with UPF in the past. Ms. Cobano comes from a Moroccan Sephardi family and speaks Arabic. She is very sensitive to the struggles Arabs and Jews are experiencing and can empathize with both parties.

Another speaker was Mr. Wafir S. Gibril, a very devout Muslim from Sudan and a great musician. Mr. Gibril has known UPF for years and was very enthusiastic about the event. He helped with the musical accompaniment to Ms. Eliyah Hera, a singer from Israel. Seeing musicians from Sudan, Iran and Spain accompanying a Jewish singer had a deep impact on all those present.

Our "Tribute to All Victims" had four themes - Music, Poetry, Messages and Prayers. The musical program included Christian hymns as well as Sufi, Arab and Jewish music. It was thoroughly enjoyed by the whole audience, who came from different religions, different communities and various backgrounds.

Dr. Mohamed Osman, a university professor of medicine who is also a poet, opened the Poetry portion of the program. He read a text written by a medical colleague of his who had died; his very emotional rendition brought tears to many in the audience. This was followed by recitations of poems presented by a Christian poet and by a military veteran and poet. Continuing on the same theme, Dr. Osman asked Mr. Armando Lozano if he would read a poem he had translated, written by Ms. Hiba Abu Nada, a young woman who had died tragically. This reading had a very moving effect on everyone.

The next theme was Peace Messages. The first message was given by Mr. Mohamed Samadi, a Moroccan professional working with refugees. He was followed by Rabbi Mario Stofenmacher. To conclude this theme, Father Rodriguez gave the last peace message in which he aptly emphasized, "The problems in this world are the results of not loving one another enough. We have to love more."

The final theme was Prayer. Mr. Gibril recited some paragraphs from the Holy Quran. As it was the last day of Hanukkah, the Jewish celebration of lights, three representatives of the community lit candles and offered prayers. To close the event there was a moment of meditation and reflection for all, with gentle music playing in the background.