

UPF Conference

“Taking up the challenges of sustainable peace and development – Vision, values, partnerships”

Paris, France, 12. December 2015



On Saturday December 12, 2015, at the Accueil Barouillère Hall in Paris, UPF France held a **conference on the theme “Taking up the challenges of sustainable peace and development – Vision, values and partnerships”**. The event was the annual assembly of Peace Ambassadors, gathering about hundred participants, including guests.

The conference was held one month after the terrorist attacks in Paris where 130 people were killed, closing a year

that had also begun with bloodshed in Paris in January. Yet other significant milestones marked the year 2015: the United Nations announcement of their 2030 Global Sustainable Development Agenda, the inauguration of the Sunhak Peace Prize, a project related to UPF that was awarded to laureates selected for their achievement in environmental issues; and the Conference on Climate gathering the world in Paris, meant to end on the same day.

Thus, the conference was organized in three sessions representing a broader vision for peace and development: interreligious dialogue as the conscience of society; the rise of a global, multicultural society; and the challenges of renewable energy for sustainable development.

The event began with a moving interreligious ceremony in honor of the 130 victims from the November 13 attacks: 130 rainbow colored origamis





Moderator Mrs. Myriam Trachez

were displayed, symbolizing the victims' souls moving toward Heaven. In front, five large candles were lit one by one from one central candle by representatives of major religions, while an excerpt of each religious scripture was read by the moderator Mrs. Myriam Trachez. Mr. Emmanuel Chouraqui, son of famed French scholar André Chouraqui, a translator of the Bible and the Coran and a co-founder of "the Fraternity of Abraham", then gave a brief testimony about his father's work. A beautiful musical piece on piano and flute played by two young UPF volunteers, Ye-Bonne M. and Takeyuki Koyama, opened and closed the ceremony.



He was followed by **Mrs. Sabine Le Blanc**, a professor of religion, who spoke on the impact and interconnectedness of spiritual experiences, beyond religious affiliation, and their potential contribution to peace.



The first session, on the theme: "Religion and politics – cooperating for lasting peace", was moderated by Patrick Jouan, the vice president of UPF France. It began with an introduction to the values underlying the conference theme by Mr. Jacques Marion, UPF France president. Then **Sheikh Abdelkader Achour**, the imam of the Omar Mosque in Paris 11th district – the district mostly hit by the November attacks – gave a talk on "The value of human being in Islam". A long-time disciple of former Grand Mufti of Syria Ahmed Kufaro, Sheikh Achour is widely respected by his coreligionists and other district religious leaders for his wisdom and spirit of tolerance.



The next speaker, **Dr. Ali Rastbeen**, the President of the Academy of Geopolitics of Paris, proposed a geopolitical appraisal of conflicts in the Middle East and gave a broad review of groups throughout the world using religious justification for their terrorist activities. The last panelist was Dr. Jean-Luc Berlet, a professor of philosophy, who offered reflections on universal values conducive to lasting peace, emphasizing the "three blessings" as framework for a meaningful life and a peaceful world.

The debate that followed, intense but respectful, focused on the connection between terrorism and religion and the role of Islam in current political developments.

The second session on the theme "One global society, one human community", was moderated by Mr. Jacques Marion. He began by reviewing UPF Peace Initiatives throughout the world, notably in the Korean Peninsula, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. He reported about the recent conference celebrating ten years of the Balkan Peace Initiative in Tirana, Albania, and raised prospects of the UPF work in the Balkans.



That served to introduce the first panelist, Dr. Nano Ruzin, a Dean of Political Science at FON University in Skopje, Macedonia, and a former Macedonia Ambassador to NATO. Speaking in French, Dr. Ruzin reviewed



Mr. Emmanuel Chouraqui, son of famed French scholar André Chouraqui

the recent history of the Balkans since the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, the ethnic conflicts that ensued, and the gradual development toward a multi-ethnic democracy in his country of Macedonia.

The next speaker was Mr. Doudou Diène, a former UNESCO High Official and United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination and intolerance. He described current societal transformations and the irreversible rise of multicultural societies, emphasizing the key role of interreligious dialogue. Such dialogue, he said, should move from a theological to an ethical base, and be grounded on human rights criteria. The final speaker

was Mr. Jean-Claude Félix-Tchikaya, a sociologist and researcher at the Institute of Prospective and Security in Europe (IPSE). Mentioning his family roots in the Congo, he spoke of the challenges of the process of integration in French society, about his work with radicalized youth, yet concluded with optimism about the prospects of multicultural society in France.



The third and last session on “Issues and challenges of energy for sustainable development” was moderated by Mr. Alexandre Huard, Youth UPF coordinator. The speakers were a husband and wife team: **Mr. Thierry M.**, an engineer in new technologies for the environment, and **Mrs. Ye-Bonne M.**, a doctoral student in fluid mechanics, both of them UPF volunteers. Giving a thorough description of the energy issues at stake regarding sustainable development and climate change, responding to questions from the floor, they stimulated the audience with a lively presentation of the key questions discussed by world leaders at the COP 21 conference, which was coming to an end, almost simultaneously, a few miles away. Thierry Madonado concluded with a presentation on the challenges and hopes of a drinkable water implantation project in Madagascar villages, where he has been participating in recent years.

The conference ended with the award of certificates to two new Peace Ambassadors: Mrs. Sobrino, an insurance agency director, and Dr. Koué, a criminologist originally from the Central African Republic, who was moved to tears as he spoke of his war-torn country.



Question from the floor - Father Anglarès, Catholic Priest - Venerable Michel Thao Chan