

UPF Southeast Asia held its first Peace Talks webinar: Challenges in Governance

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Southeast Asia -- UPF-Southeast Asia held its first "Peace Talks" webinar on the theme "Challenges in Governance in Our Time of a Global Pandemic: Southeast Asian Perspective" on June 11 from 6:00 PM to 7:40 PM, Manila time. With seven knowledgeable speakers from Southeast Asia nations -- Thailand, Philippines, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Myanmar -- the webinar drew 584 registered participants from 25 nations across Asia Pacific and other parts of the world.

Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal, chairman of UPF and the International Association of Parliamentarians (IAPP) for the Asia Pacific region, gave the opening remarks and spoke on the transnational threat that the pandemic has brought to the world and how it needs a global response in order to mitigate its daunting effects and challenges. Echoing UPF's statement on Covid-19 last April 21, he reminded everyone that it is the time to work together and foster unity and peace so that we can move beyond this crisis and emerge with a stronger, healthier and more cooperative family of nations as we rebuild our lives and economic fortunes together.

Dr. Chung Sik Yong, regional group chairman of UPF-Asia Pacific, delivered his remarks as well and welcomed everyone to the webinar on behalf of the founders, Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon. He stressed the role of UPF in building bridges of harmony and understanding between the various faiths in the world and in educating the youth and families as well as leaders of the world about the fundamental principles of good governance. He spoke of how we should take this global crisis as a greater opportunity to forge unity and cooperation among nations, especially in the Southeast Asian region.

Dr. Julius Malicdem, director of UPF-Southeast Asia, served as the moderator and introduced the panelists to the audience.

Panelists:

Dr. Monthip Sriratana, former deputy permanent secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and former member of Parliament in Thailand, spoke first and mentioned that Covid-19 has exposed the government's weaknesses and helped identify where we can strengthen our governance for the benefit of all Thais. She tackled four vital areas that need to be given attention to. First, the government needs to build resilience in the middle- and low-income classes. She said that we need to get serious about building strong social safety nets under the most vulnerable in our society. A strong social protection program is a must if we are to successfully resist future outbreaks of Covid-19 and other natural disasters, including the immediate and long-term effects of climate change. She also mentioned about the need to stop illegal wildlife trade, protect wild areas and strengthen the education system so that the populace could be resilient to perturbations such as Covid-19. Most importantly, we should aim to implement the UN Agenda 2030 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Hon. Leopoldo Bataoil, mayor of Lingayen, Pangasinan; former Congressman, Philippine House of Representatives; and president of IAPP-Philippines, spoke next. He narrated how the Philippine government and its local government units are dealing with the virus so far. With the enactment of R.A 11469 or The Bayanihan to Heal as One Act, the executive branch of the government was able to have the

power to implement temporary measures to respond to the crisis brought about by Covid-19, which includes adopting and implementing measures based on World Health Organization guidelines and best practices to prevent or suppress further transmission of the virus. Social distancing, a travel ban and temporary community lockdowns are being observed in different parts of the nation. A state of calamity and public health emergency is being imposed, authorizing local government units to redirect and realign funds purposely to address the virus. With everyone's cooperation and continuing effort, the country is now moving toward normalization. In his constituency, there are no more reported cases, and the general community quarantine will end by June 15. Still, people are not keeping their guards down and are continuously practicing social distancing until a vaccine will be readily available.

H.E. Suos Yara, member of the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Cambodia and serving as the vice chairman of the Commission of Foreign Affairs. He is also the director general of the Asian Cultural Council and vice-president of the Centrist Democrat International for the Asia-Pacific Region. He reported that Cambodia was able to prevent a community outbreak, with only 126 cases of Covid-19, 0 fatalities and 125 recovered patients. He emphasized the main challenges that the region is facing in these times of crisis in the economy, tourism, foreign direct investment, and the health sector. He said that the goal of Cambodia is to promote multilateralism and forge alliances with other nations to pursue the common goal of combating the virus. He stressed that the times are calling for us to build on dependency and solidarity and work together with the World Health Organization and make any vaccination accessible to all. This is the time to end racism and violence. Politicians should work together to cooperate and not to divide a class. He also underscored the importance of the powerful nations' assistance to promote solidarity. He said that if we present ourselves together in solidarity, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations can be united in this time of crisis, bridging a state among Asian countries to uphold the principle of centrality and solidarity.

Dato' Muhammad Nasir Hamzah, deputy chairman of Karangkrif Media Group from Malaysia, said that that even before the recent pandemic, thousands have died already of famine, malnutrition, injustice, war and so forth. He stressed that one of the most glaring concerns that needs urgent solution is that millions of stateless people are now forced to become refugees. Millions of children, women and the aged died because the Third World countries refused to accept them. He cited the thousands of Rohingyas who just arrived on Malaysia's shores seeking refuge. He said the Rohingyas should not only be Malaysian problem but should also be of concern to other developed countries as they practice and share their spirit of humanity. In closing, he said that to solve these concurrent problems, harmony is of uttermost importance: We must live in harmony, respecting each other, including the people around us, our families, our neighbors, our municipalities, our state, and our country.

H.E. Dr. Abdul Wahid Maktub, special adviser to the minister of Research, Technology and Higher Education of Indonesia and former ambassador of Indonesia to Qatar, highlighted that this global pandemic is a warning from God; we also need to take the positive aspect of this crisis. He said that we sometimes forget who God is in the midst of technology. Because of this disease, we are reminded once again of the role of God in our lives, loving each other and sharing with each other. We tend to forget our position as human beings. This is the time for human reflection on how important unity is. We need to renew our spirit and go back to God. What is brought by UPF is truly relevant and should be comprehended and applied on the ground. We can connect to universal values and a universal God. This must be realized by all people. He stressed that everyone is one family, and UPF has the moral obligation to spread this teaching to all nations.

Dr. Bibi Jan Mohamed Ayyub, board member, Club HEAL from Singapore, said that as she represents the people on the ground, she was able to learn from the challenges that we face in this time of global pandemic. First, there is a need to have an integrative and inclusive approach to engage and involve all members of society so that they may be able to effectively respond and manage this phenomenon of such scale. This approach should permeate across levels where the shared values and synergistic effort of "leaders" at the macro and micro levels are garnered to overcome this global crisis, whether they be the government, the medical authorities, community leaders, civil society, and even the "leaders" in every family within the home setting. Second is to adopt principle-driven policies to ensure public acceptance. That is, organizational leaders need to communicate clearly on issues that matter to stakeholders. Third, we must provide timely and appropriate responses. She stressed that a big part of crisis management skills is the ability to observe in order to ensure that we are not only able to function effectively to address issues in our own hands but also mitigate any undesirable or unintended consequences that may occur. Lastly, we need to embrace change graciously by capitalizing on digitalization, the use of social media, and networks to bring about greater synergy with the community that we are working with.

Ven. Dr. Sobhita, founder, International Buddhist Education Center in Myanmar, spoke on how the global pandemic has exposed the inherent weaknesses and fundamental flaws that exist within our democratic systems; we as a global community are now even more aware of the futility and fragility of our democratic systems and their ability to adapt and cope with the global crisis. He said that we cannot allow our systems to come to a stop; we must fight to ensure that peace and prosperity continue to be shared and that the developed nations do not forget about the developing ones whose economic and social recovery

will be an even more arduous task. It is imperative that global cooperation and working together for the common good are still important. He stressed that all people, whatever their differences may be, can live together side by side in unison through mutual understanding and respect for one another.

Question and Answer Session:

Dr. Robert S. Kittel, Chairman of International Association of Youth and Students for Peace, facilitated the Q and A portion. He directed these questions to the panel:

Can you point out at least one or any advantage of Covid-19 and maybe a lesson learned, in relation to the climatic change caused by carbon emissions by large international companies?

Dr. Monthip Sriratana: After Covid-19, the impact of pollution and emission of carbon dioxide (CO₂) reduced sharply. How will greenhouse gases change after the lockdown ends? We found that the energy used during the Covid-19 pandemic is less than usual, with a 4 to 8% reduction or 2,000 to 3,000 tons of CO₂ or 6 to 10 times lower. So, we can observe that travel is less extensive. In Thailand, the airports are closed. There have been only few flights to allow the Thai people to return home. Also, there is a less amount of energy used. For example, I could see a less amount of energy in New York. There is 20% reduced energy used in Paris. We can see that air pollution is less. We can see Mt. Everest from Nepal. The skies are clearer. This will lead in the reduction of greenhouse gas. If we continue to reduce CO₂ by 5% every year until CO₂ reduction reaches 0 in 2050, we can control the rate of increase of emission and the temperature of the world will be not more than 1.5 degrees Celsius within this century. I am very pleased to tell you that now Malaysia, according to Dr. Noh Abdullah, director general of the Health Department, will also soon be Covid-19- free, similar to Thailand. So this is very good news.

Do you agree with the Philippine government's actions to give funds to low-income people under the Social Amelioration Program during the Enhanced Community Quarantine? Or would you rather do something else like build hospitals, support PPE needs and the front line workers, etc?

Hon. Leopoldo Bataoil: Actually, we did all those things that you have mentioned. When the Bayanihan Heal as One Act was enacted, the law that authorized us to provide various assistance to our constituents, when the lockdown was started, we provided people with food. That was rendered by the national government, providing us with the needed funds for the procurement of various relief goods. Second, we were provided with the funds to be given to the poorest of the poor who were directly affected by Covid-19. We also did that, although there were so many challenges that we faced: for example, in ensuring that the money will be handled or given to those who are qualified for that purpose. For those people locked down in their respective homes, we regularly gave them items for their sustenance. But then we cannot provide those things on a regular basis. So from Extreme Enhanced Quarantine Community, we moved to General Community, where slowly we are now allowing people to go out and avail themselves of different commodities that are rendered on a regulated basis. Our people now have managed to subsist with the system that we are in. I believe that is the right thing to do. However, we realize that we cannot go on like this for a long period of time. We expect that after June 15, we will be able to go back to normal, where trade and commerce will be opened, and transport facilities will be allowed to operate. These are the things that we expect to observe, although we will continually be guided by the protocols that will be given to us to follow. On that note, I believe that continual monitoring of the situation will go hand in hand with the level of logistical support and the opening of businesses for this purpose.

We have heard that Cambodia welcomed a cruise ship with passengers that might have been affected by COVID 19 virus. This cruise ship was said to have been rejected by other nations. If this is true, how did Cambodia handle the passengers, and where are they now?

H.E. Sous Yara: First, we must appreciate our leader, Prime Minister Hun Sen, for his openness, cooperation and so much humanitarian respect. The cruise ship "Westerdam" was rejected by many countries. Only Cambodia accepted the Westerdam on February 14, which is Valentine's day. We received the request only two days in advance. We coordinated with the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia to identify the registration and to understand the ownership of the ship. We understand that the virus outbreak was just a fear. There were 2,400 passengers on board the Westerdam. If we left them behind, this ship would have nowhere to go because Cambodia is the last place for it to berth. At this point, we contacted our medical experts. We set up the treatment centers. We contacted our friends from other countries to get the materials to protect our doctors and nurses. With all this ground protection and readiness, we could be very sure that we could help.

At first, we were short of testing kits. Testing was the key for us to build trust. We did random checks. To be honest, we did not even have a thousand kits to test the 2,400 passengers. But with random checks and trust, it made us more confident that this ship and its passengers and crew were not infected. So, we sent them to a 14-day quarantine, and they were all safe to go home. So, they are now back home. From 41 nations, we received a word of thanks from 41 nations, including President Donald Trump who tweeted a message to the world. The other leaders made a phone call to our leader.

Regarding our measures to detect and counter Covid-19, we have learned from the outbreak in Wuhan China. It was like the Chinese New Year during the outbreak in Wuhan. As the outbreak came through Asia is through airports so our thoughts were on how we could lock down the cities and the provinces. We had a partial lockdown. We only went to cities where aircraft landed. Mostly our cases were imported. We had to prevent community outbreak. We imposed a temporary school lockdown. Students are a priority for us. Schools were the first to lockdown. Next, we had a partial community lockdown, and then an entertainment lockdown. After that, 2,000 volunteers from among soldiers and medical school graduates went to the hospitals in the provinces.

Also, all those coming from Thailand from the Songkran [New Year's] Festival had to undergo a 14-day quarantine. We encourage everyone to wear a mask (in our case, it is a scarf) and practice social distancing. A scarf is our traditional gear and is the immediate prevention for the people who have no ability to buy a mask. Social distancing is a rule, but not easy to practice. We have flexibility in the government policy, openness, accountability and offer services free of charge. Every Covid-19 patient who is accepted in our hospitals will be paid for by the government.

How will the coronavirus reshape democracy and governance globally? How will this affect our relationships in Southeast Asia and the world?

Dr. Abdul Wahid Maktub: All of us realize the new reality, which is a big shift from the conventional culture to a new culture. Now humans are more self-reliant because of this disease. Now we begin to realize the importance of freedom and interdependence. Now everything is online. Before there was no time for family. Now we have time for family. We began to diversify, and communication is now much more expanded beyond our territory.

Ven. Dr. Sobitha: Democracy after Covid-19 will respect four principle values: value of religion, value of culture and tradition, value of social resiliency, and value of education for all.

Peace Talks Webinar Series
UPF Southeast Asia
 Theme: "Challenges in Governance in Our Time of a Global Pandemic: Southeast Asian Perspective"

SPEAKERS:

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- USA:** DR. ROBERT S. MITCHELL
- THAILAND:** MS. NONTHALEE ENGLERESA
- PHILIPPINES:** MS. LEOPOLINA SALGADO
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