UPF Melbourne Australia Community Leaders Share Ways to "Invest in Peace"

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Melbourne, Australia - UPF-Australia and the Australian Peace Council brought together 60 community leaders, educators, multicultural representatives and peacebuilders in Melbourne on September 19, 2026, for a special conference marking the United Nations International Day of Peace.

Held under the UN theme "Invest in Peace - For Everyone, Everywhere, Every Day," the conference explored how peace can be strengthened through practical action in families, communities, schools and the wider society. The program emphasized that peace is not simply the absence of war, but a lived experience of safety, dignity, opportunity and cooperation.

A panel of Australian Peace Council members examined the role of everyday peacebuilders and how local action can contribute to stability and lasting peace. The panel was composed of Dr. John Bellavance, vice president of UPF-Australia; Mr. Kuol Malou, founder of the Third Space Narrative; Mr. Essan Dileri, senior diversity and intercultural advisor at Melton City Council; Dr. Degu Abebe, associate professor at the International University of Health Sciences; and Mr. Jacob Thang, founder and chairperson of Chin-Myanmar Community Care.

The keynote speaker, Mr. Chris Hume, shared about the youth program he is leading as an Indigenous community leader fostering cultural wellbeing. Mr. Hume said that young Indigenous men need to find

themselves, with a clear awareness of their identity and a sense of belonging. Otherwise, they will find it in drugs and alcohol. He introduced the Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place Singing Group, which delighted all with their peaceful music.



The second panel focused on the importance of interfaith education in high schools. They addressed the topic "Educational approaches for improving social cohesion - Rethinking our approach to religious education and interfaith in Australia." The first panelist was Ms. Kamlavathi Reddy of Monash Interfaith Gathering, who shared about the recent Inaugural Monash Interfaith Schools Program. Three hundred students took part in this religious literacy program, in which seven faiths were presented by students.

The second panelist, Ms. Mel Beal, vice principal for student community and development at Huntingtower College, shared her delight that students could speak so well about religious traditions, and the shared values that exist among different traditions. The student-led event contributed to mutual understanding and social cohesion in an increasingly diverse Australia.

The conference also recognized individuals who have made significant contributions to peace internationally and to community wellbeing, through the UPF Ambassador for Peace Award. Awards were presented to Amb. Dr. Sayed Fadlullah Fadel, former ambassador of Afghanistan to the Arab Republic of Egypt; Ms. Sivanthi Gurumurothy, respected community leader, multicultural advocate and humanitarian; and Mr. Chris Cosgriff and his wife Mrs. Heather Cosgriff, tireless community advocates for reconciliation, who have been involved in numerus local community service projects.

Through dialogue, education, cultural understanding and community service, the conference highlighted a central message: Peace is everyone's responsibility. It is built by people, everywhere, every day.