

UPF Copenhagen, Denmark's International Day of Peace 2017 held at UN City

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Copenhagen, Denmark—About 150 people attended a UPF commemoration of the International Day of Peace held at UN City, one of Copenhagen’s well-known landmarks.

Former Member of Parliament Yildiz Akdogan welcomed the audience to the September 24, 2017, event. The participants included current and former MPs, religious leaders, NGO and other civil leaders, Ambassadors for Peace, artists and peace activists. In her welcoming address Ms. Akdogan said it is important not to divide people into “them and us”; rather we need to commit to cooperation.

Talk show and radio host Lotte Heise introduced the 2017 theme for International Day of Peace, as designated by the United Nations: “Together for Peace—Respect, Safety and Dignity for All.” She urged the audience to be vigilant and committed to these goals. She pointed out that it is important for parents to involve their children in these efforts.

Connie Hedegaard, a former EU commissioner and Danish government minister, mentioned that many of today’s crises are due to increasing inequality and lack of concern for the environment. We need to follow a new development and growth model laid out by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), she said. This does not concern only the developing countries, she said; it concerns north and south, all of us, even though it has not yet dawned on some of us in Europe.

Professor Steen Hildebrandt, PhD, said the SDGs—probably the most important decision made since the founding of the United Nations in 1948, he said—are the beginning of a new paradigm shift, a revolution. The Industrial Revolution made the Western world very rich but kept many people outside. The key principle in the SDGs is “Leave no one behind,” he said. He talked about a spiritual transformation and said we need to educate the next generation to have a global view and understanding, to become global citizens! This development has just started and still moves slowly, but it will accelerate like a rolling snowball, he said. The key is for each of us to change our minds and to understand that change starts with myself. After that, human behavior can be changed easily.

During the 30-minute break, sandwiches, chocolates and drinks were served and there were very happy and lively discussions among all participants.

The fourth presenter was author and mentor Kirsten Stendevad, who emphasized that we need to focus on internal instead of external development. We are now moving from the yang paradigm, a more masculine energy, to the yin paradigm, a more feminine-oriented energy, she said. We are all in the same boat, all of us with the same hopes and fears, but in the feminine energy we all will be connected to each other, she said.

The last speaker was nurse Merete Bonde Pilgaard, founder of Venligboerne (which might be translated as “Kind Citizens”). As a nurse, she noticed that only showing kindness influenced the health and well-being of her patients. In 2013, that motivated her to start a campaign to meet others with kindness. After it spread in her municipality, the members also started to practice kindness toward refugees, and it caused the movement to spread rapidly all over Denmark and even to neighboring countries with 160,000 members.



Merete Bonde Pilgaard often was asked what her methods and principles were, and she replied, “Kindness.” Then she thought that was too simple an answer, she said. However, after thorough contemplation she found that in fact it was the correct answer. She said that in meeting others with kindness, everyone can be included and involved. All of us know what kindness is, even though we do not always practice it. She emphasized the vital role of parents and family in becoming role models, and she said that parents and children both need each other in order to grow and develop.

Led by Elizabeth Bramsen, the audience stood and sang We Are the World.

Dr. Thorkil Christensen, the co-chair of UPF-Denmark, introduced the Peace Ceremony and invited a group of religious representatives as well as all participants present to participate. The religious leaders representing Judaism, Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam and Sikhism gathered in a half-circle on the stage, each with a bottle of water. Dr. Christensen asked them through prayer, thoughts and feelings also to fill the bottle with the longing of their hearts, a symbol that we all together contribute each in our way and unite in fulfilling our common goals. He asked all the participants to rise, join hands, and with closed eyes also offer prayers and send heartfelt thoughts to the millions of people whom we hope to reach. In a solemn atmosphere with quiet music the religious representatives simultaneously poured their water into a common glass bowl. Hand in hand, everyone was deeply moved to have participated in this beautiful ceremony.

The cultural performances started with the Danish-Swedish soprano Anna Karina Sundstedt and one of Denmark’s finest young pianists, Janus Araghypour. They performed four pieces in four languages, all related to peace and spreading love and joy, among them an aria from the opera *La Rondine* of Giacomo Puccini, *Höre Ich Zigeunergeigen* from Emmerich Kálmán’s operetta *Countess Mariza*, and the popular song *Over the Rainbow*.

They were followed by two young violin virtuosos, Valdemar and Villads Littauer Bendixen, only 18 and 15 years old. Both attend Bach Music College in Berlin and have won many awards and gold medals in international music competitions. Despite their young age they already have toured the world. They played a mix of Antonio Vivaldi’s *The Four Seasons*, *Thunderstruck* by the hard-rock band AC/DC, the tango *Jalousie* by Jacob Gade, *The Swan* from Camille Saint-Saens’ *Carnival of the Animals*, and the song *Hallelujah* by Leonard Cohen.

Everyone was moved and uplifted by the messages, music, songs and ceremony, and felt the program was a substantial contribution to peace.

The event was beautifully moderated by a loyal UPF supporter, Marion Pedersen, an Ambassador for Peace and a former member of Parliament.