

UPF inaugurates Interreligious Association for Peace and Development in Italy

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Rome, Italy -- UPF inaugurated the Italian chapter of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), a UPF association, in an online event.

The meeting, held under the title "The Right to Spirituality for Peace and Human Development," took place on December 9, 2020, the eve of Human Rights Day.

Carlo Zonato, the president of UPF-Italy, opened the meeting by summarizing the purposes of IAPD. He read the words of UPF founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon: "First of all, we must respect the traditions of other religions and prevent conflict and discord between faiths; second, to have all religious communities cooperate in serving the world."

A video about UPF activities was shown, followed by a musical performance. The first speaker was Imam Nader Akkad, a PhD and researcher. He said it was "very nice to see the composition of this inaugural day, made up of so many brothers from different denominations and religions ... and how this was precisely the meaning of the association, to work for peace, development and the prosperity of human beings and humanity."

Rabbi Barbara Aiello, the first woman rabbi in Italy and founder of the Progressive Jewish Pluralist Movement, said: "It is an honor to share with you the holiday of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, which for us brings peace. ... It is an opportunity to build an interreligious bridge." The rabbi lit the eight candles of the holiday candelabra, explaining their significance, and concluded with a song of blessing.

Don Valentino Cottini, a professor of Islamic-Christian relations, noted that IAPD "aims for peace among religions. How could the Catholic Church not join an initiative that aims at peace by creating a dialogue

among religions?" He emphasized that the Catholic Church "does not cease to seek to create links," and he recalled Pope Francis' work with the grand imam of al-Azhar and the encyclical titled Fratelli Tutti ("All Brothers").

After a video showing a performance of the Little Angels Children's Folk Ballet of Korea, Luis Miguel Perea Castrillon, a bishop of the Anglican Episcopal Church of Europe, was the next speaker. "We need to build more bridges of communion, rather than walls and borders that drive us away from peace," he said. "The novelty of this association," he added, "is the concrete invitation to renew our most intimate vocation and the imprint of love that has been sown in our hearts."

Tibetan Buddhist monk Tenzin Khentse said he was convinced that "those who see in other traditions only a difference, and see theirs as better, are not making religion. On the other hand, those who see their own tradition confirmed and emphasized in the other traditions, because they hear it told in different words and can understand it better, are really on the right spiritual path."

Francesco Canale, an Evangelical pastor, noted that "there are places in the world where believers are persecuted and places where there is the possibility of believing, but where people have stopped doing so, manifesting a spiritual dryness. That's why realities like IAPD can make a difference and should be supported. ... They remind us how important it is to respect and listen to others' versions of the truth."

The meeting continued with Michele Cavallotto, coordinator of the Italian chapter of IAPD, who read the association's Founding Declaration, followed by messages of good wishes.

Gerardo Giovagnoli, San Marino's delegate to the Council of Europe, recalled how his country "in 2007, when it was at the presidency of the Council of Europe, wanted to bring the focus on the theme of intercultural and religious dialogue, because it feeds on the concept of peace and dialogue for the solution of conflicts."

Dr. Raffaella Di Marzio, founder of the Center for Freedom of Religion, explained that she knows IAPD not only because of its international activities, "but because I also know some of the people who work there, and for this very reason I want to wish this association the best of success in a world where values are often enunciated but little practiced."

The event ended with the awarding of Ambassador for Peace certificates to the speakers. "By transcending racial, national and religious barriers," the certificate reads, "Ambassadors for Peace contribute to the realization of the hope of every generation: a world of peace and unity."