

## UPF Burgenland, Austria Holds Rethinking the Concept of Peace Event

Johann Rechberger  
September 11, 2022



Stadtschlaining, Austria - Speakers at a UPF peace conference described their experiences of reconciling enemy nations and ethnicities.

"Rethinking the Concept of Peace" was the title of a UPF-Austria peace conference held on September 11, 2022, in the Schlaining Castle, located in the Austrian state of Burgenland bordering Hungary.

The castle is the home of the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, which has hosted many peace conferences and peace study programs. The "Rethinking Peace" event, which started as a local project of UPF-Burgenland, became a very special event through the involvement of the Austrian chapters of UPF and Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), an affiliated organization.



Johann Rechberger, the leader of UPF-Burgenland, was the moderator of the conference, which was attended by approximately 70 participants.

The program began with a very inspiring speech by Ursula Gamauf-Eberhardt, the program director of the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, who told about Sadako Sasaki, a Japanese girl who died in 1955 at age 12, ten years after being exposed to radiation from the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Before she died, Sadako folded 1,000 pieces of paper into origami cranes.

Mrs. Gamauf-Eberhardt radiated a lot of hope and was very surprised when she saw the 2,400 perfectly folded colorful paper cranes brought by Ruiko Friesacher, a Japanese UPF supporter who lives in Vienna. Mrs. Friesacher explained that she had folded these cranes during the corona pandemic, wishing for a quick end to this "plague." All the participants were deeply touched by this story.



The chair of UPF for Central Europe, Dr. Dieter Schmidt, outlined the UPF philosophy, its core values and principles, and described Father Moon's meeting in 1991 with Kim Il Sung in North Korea.

Dr. Afsar Rathor, a former United Nations diplomat and president of the environmental organization LIOS-SOIL, spoke of his personal experiences during a UN peacebuilding mission in Rwanda in 1994 at the time of the Rwandan genocide, in which Hutu extremists killed thousands of Tutsi and other Hutu. It was a very personal account about the UN's and his own efforts to bring reconciliation, which then led to a lively discussion with the audience.



Dr. Monisa Hassan, a medical doctor from the Kabul Medical Faculty in Afghanistan, gave a presentation titled "Women's Perspectives of Peace and Security in Afghanistan" in which she reported on her personal

experiences during a recent trip to Afghanistan. Dr. Hassan then presented a hand-knitted carpet with the logo and lettering of WFWP-Austria to the organization's president, Renate Amesbauer. It was an emotional moment which established the deep connection of WFWP-Austria with women in Afghanistan.

Johannes Reis, the director of the Jewish Museum in the city of Eisenstadt, spoke about Jewish traditions in Burgenland under the rule of the Esterházy noble family of Hungary and the seven holy Jewish communities in Burgenland. His remarks gave a clearer insight into Jewish religious practices.



Finally, Dr. Leo Gabriel, a social anthropologist, journalist, documentary filmmaker and co-founder of the World Social Forum meeting of civil society organizations, spoke about the role of peace movements. He noted that the war in Ukraine probably could have been avoided, if the Western countries had invested more in trust-building and confidence-building measures.

Peter Haider, the president of UPF-Austria, then awarded Ambassador for Peace certificates to three prominent Burgenlanders who are actively working for a global culture of peace: Johannes Reis, director of the Jewish Museum in Eisenstadt; Wolfgang Kovacs, the mayor of the Burgenland town of Parndorf; and Johann Korlath, a journalist, celebrity photographer and writer.

A final highlight of the event was the tribute paid to Peter Haider and his wife, Dominique, by representatives of the United Nations Correspondents Association Vienna and the Horn of Africa Peace Initiative. In recognition of their support for these projects, Mr. and Mrs. Haider were given a certificate of recognition and a big bouquet of flowers.

At the end of the event there was a lively exchange among the participants. Many thanks to all who contributed to its success.

