

UPF holds first conference ever on interfaith dialogue in Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Dhaka, Bangladesh -- Partnering with the U.S. Department of State, UPF held the first ever conference on interfaith dialogue at the Edward M. Kennedy (EMK) Center in Dhaka, Bangladesh on October 20, 2016.

Praising the ground-breaking event, which more than 70 students attended, Mr. M.K. Aaref, director of the EMK Center, said “My problem is this program was not long enough. I want to see more of this [kind of] interfaith dialogue, [but] it just does not happen. In [the] four years of existence of this center, this is the first one.”

At the beginning of UPF’s presentations, quotes from all religious traditions were cited showing that holy books view altruism as the essence of goodness. “Living for sake of others” is the motto of UPF Founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon. Mr. Aaref noted this point, saying, “You published messages from different religions and they are all so similar, but we [usually] don’t dwell on that.”

Dr. Chung-sik Yong, chair of UPF-Asia, explained how youth can build religious harmony through preparing to build good families. “The family builds on our religious heritage, because all religions honor marriage and family. And at the same time, the family transcends religion. Whether I am a Muslim, a Hindu, a Christian, a Buddhist or any other believer, the more important issue is ‘What type of family will I create?’”

He then built on the concept of “microfinance” from Bangladesh’s Nobel Laureate, Muhammad Yunus, saying UPF advocates “micro peace.” This concept takes the ethical and moral values needed to create peace and harmony in the home and can be scaled-up to apply at the social, national, and global levels.

Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal, a member of Parliament and former minister of Nepal, who is the chair of UPF-Nepal, highlighted the role the chapter played in the decade-long peace process in Nepal. Taking the principle of “living for the sake of others” and applying it in the political process, UPF-Nepal helped foster dialogue among former enemy combatants. Personal relationships were key to this transformation, Mr. Dhakal emphasized.

Mr. Imran Ahsan, program coordinator of UPF-Bangladesh, reflected on the positive impact of the event. “After this conference surely students will have a more tolerant mind. They will start respecting other religions. Already many students contacted me on social media and asked to be invited to future programs. This program adds value.”

The co-emcees for the event were Mr. Ahsan and Ms. Silvia Rosaria.