

Encouraging Social Engagement and Loyal Citizenship

Moonshik Kim
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Moonshik Kim with Islamic educator, Mufti Aasim Rashid, the leader of a mosque, in Burnaby, Canada

Encouraging Social Engagement and Loyal Citizenship among Disaffected Youth was the theme of the joint annual conference of Universal Peace Federation and the Women's Federation for World Peace held in the Ontario Legislature Building at Queen's Park in Toronto, Canada, on October 27, 2016. Ontario is Canada's largest province and Toronto the country's largest metropolis.

The gathering began with introductory remarks by the master of ceremonies, Mr. Daniel Stringer, and an Indigenous Welcome to Sacred Land conducted by two Indigenous advocates and mothers -- both leading representatives of their communities in Ottawa and panelists for this conference. Well-known Juno Award winning singer, Ms. Liberty Silver, sang a stirring rendition of the national anthem.

In his welcoming remarks Dr. Moonshik Kim, UPF-Canada chair, shared about the founders' vision and efforts for peace and succinctly clarified the guiding principles of the Universal Peace Federation. A brief video presentation of UPF's global activities followed.

Radicalism's beginnings

The first panel entitled "Exploring the Root Causes of Youth Radicalization" was moderated by Mr. Franco Famularo, UPF Canada's secretary general, and included four panelists. Mr. Paul Tamale, who had assisted two former attorney generals of Ontario with a report on the Roots of Youth Violence, reported that, poverty, attitudes of people in authority such as teachers and law enforcement officials were all factors, but that family instability is at the root of much of the disillusionment leading to violence in Canadian society.

Meriem Rebbani-Gosselin of the Center for Prevention of Radicalization leading to Violence, which is in Montreal, was the next speaker. In 2015, Ban Ki-moon, secretary general of the United Nations visited their center and recognized the organization's efforts as a model for other nations to follow. Ms. Rebbani-Gosselin provided insightful research that clearly shows that youth radicalization is not limited to a certain economic class or gender. She provided concrete examples of one particular cell uncovered in Montreal that committed themselves to travel to Syria to join the organization known variously as ISIL, ISIS and Islamic State.

Diverse representation

Each panel consisted of representatives from the Black, Indigenous and Muslim communities. The Indigenous perspective in the first panel was presented by Ms. Jocelyn Wabano- Iahtail, a PhD. Candidate at Carleton University who has personal experience on First Nation territory with the abuse of her people. Her mother recently received an apology from the Canadian Parliament due to systemic abuse experienced through the residential school system. She shared how indigenous spirituality contributes to the healing process and through an interactive exercise with the audience put emphasis on the sacredness of each person.

Dr. Jooyoung Lee of the University of Toronto, an expert on youth gangs and gun violence emphasized

the role of the promotion of the arts, music and culture as a way for prevention of youth engaging in violence. He explained the pitfalls of punitive policing and suggested a public health approach to gang violence.



Left to right: Paul Tamale, who spoke about a five-volume study done on the roots of violence following the murder of a black teenager; Franco Famularo, UPF-Canada's secretary general; Meriem Rebbani-Gosselin of the Center for Prevention of Radicalization leading to Violence; Ms. Jocelyn Wabano-Iahtail, who spoke as one of Canada's indigenous people; Dr. Jooyoung Lee of the University of Toronto, who spoke on gang violence in the US city of Los Angeles

Key maternal input

The second panel on the pivotal role of mothers in the prevention of youth radicalization consisted of a teacher, minister, indigenous lawyer and representatives of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's Integrated National Security Enforcement.

Moderated by Mrs. Lilly Tadin, president of the Women's Federation for World Peace in Canada, the session started with an insightful presentation by Ms. Sameen Affaf a teacher with a graduate specialization in social exclusion and marginalization. Affaf referred to six areas that mothers help prevent radicalization by giving recognition through providing a sense of identity; connection through a sense of belonging; intervention by nurturing their child; creating a culture of love through education; supplying validation by giving voice to disaffection and finally by providing a sense of awareness through taking notice.

Dealing with hardships

Rev. Sky Starr, a trauma specialist and grief counselor shared about her experience with victims of youth violence and with their mothers. Mothers have the added burden of continuing to nurture their families in spite of their grief.

Deniseanne Boissoneau, a representative of the Indigenous Anishinaabe and Ojibway community and a practicing lawyer explained that in her view a mother builds a child and that the criminal justice system requires reform to incorporate restorative justice.

Sergeant Mia Poscente and Inspector Don Halina of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Integrated National Security Enforcement Team provided the perspective of the National Police force through being proactive in dealing with youth radicalization. Both Mr. Halina and Ms. Poscente explained that the police are willing to collaborate with every community in preventing youth violence and radicalization.

Islamic concerns

Mufti Aasim Rashid, a distinguished Islamic scholar and educator from Vancouver, explained the challenges of radicalization for the Canadian Muslim community.

Rashid is also founder of Al-Ihsan Educational Foundation and just launched "Islam Unraveled," which is committed to educating Canadian institutions about Islam. He declared that radicalization can only be defeated from within the Muslim community. He said Muslims must find their place within Canadian society while retaining their identity.

Rashid expressed his frustration with the media for reporting from a limited perspective. He explained that devoted Muslims are not extremists and that through education stereotypes and misunderstandings can be dispelled.

Each panel included a lively question and answer session and the meeting concluded with an explanation and commissioning of ambassadors for peace.