

## UPF International's private meeting with Pope Francis at the pope's Vatican office

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July 1, 2019



Vatican City -- A delegation from UPF International had a private meeting with His Holiness Pope Francis at the pope's office in the Vatican.

The delegation consisted of Dr. Thomas G. Walsh, the chair of UPF International; Dr. Tageldin Hamad, vice president of UPF International; and H.E. Hisham Badr, the ambassador of Egypt to Italy and the president of the World Food Programme Executive Board.

The thirty-minute meeting took place on July 1, 2019, in the pope's office around a simple desk with His Holiness, the UPF delegates, and an interpreter.

Pope Francis has been a leading advocate for many of the same ideals and values that UPF also embraces, such as the promotion of interreligious dialogue through the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue; strengthening the family through the Pontifical Council for the Family; and care for the environment, as evidenced in the pope's encyclical *Laudato si'* ("Praise Be to You"), on care for our common home.

On several occasions UPF has participated in programs at the Vatican, such as the special consultation on the crisis in Syria, convened by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 2014; the 50th anniversary program in honor of *Nostra aetate* ("In Our Time"), the 1965 encyclical of Pope Paul VI that opened the way for more respectful engagement between Catholics and people of other faiths; and an ongoing collaboration with the Holy See Mission to the United Nations in New York.

In his opening remarks, the pope underscored the importance of peace. He spoke with deep concern about the hypocrisy of those who speak of peace but sell weapons of war. He expressed genuine appreciation

for all those who work for peace.

During the meeting, Pope Francis was briefed on recent developments and programs of UPF, including IAPP, IAPD and the effort to engage all sectors, a principle that he wholeheartedly affirmed. UPF's global work, based on the vision of the founders, was summarized.

His Holiness spoke to the UPF delegation of the importance of prayer and of the family. He then related the background of the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together that resulted from a collaborative effort between Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar on February 4, 2019, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The document invites "all persons who have faith in God and faith in human fraternity to unite and work together so that it may serve as a guide for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters." Pope Francis presented each member of the delegation with a copy of the document.

Pope Francis is not only a man of great intellectual capacity but equally a man of the heart, with a passion for people and a passion for peace. He was eager to encourage the UPF delegation, and, as is his custom, he asked that we pray for him.

The meeting concluded with a brief discussion about the upcoming UPF World Summit 2020. A request was made to His Holiness to submit a message of encouragement and support. The UPF delegation was encouraged to submit a formal request in the coming days.

We trust that this important meeting will serve to enhance and strengthen the relationship between UPF and the Catholic Church. Members of the delegation made it very clear to Pope Francis that we want to be supportive and to contribute to advancing mutual concerns for peace for all humanity.

