

## IAPD / UPF Buenos Aires, Argentina's Religious Freedom Panel at Human Rights World Forum

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**Buenos Aires, Argentina** -- "Religious Freedom: A Right under Threat in the World" was the title of the panel hosted by UPF/Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) in Argentina and Civil Association Acercando Naciones at the 2023 3rd Human Rights World Forum in Argentina. A special guest was **Massimo Introvigne**, a renowned international specialist on religious freedom, founder and director of CESNUR (Studies Center on New Religions).



The event took place on March 22, 2023 at Buenos Aires University's Architecture, Design and Urbanism Faculty, in Buenos Aires City. Representatives of different communities spoke about this violated right in various countries: **Ísa Altekin**, director of the Alba Intercultural Dialogue Center; **Iya Adéwálé Eugenia Calvi Ifadamitan Elebuibon**, president of the Ile ti Oya-ogun Africanist Religious Association; **Susana Segovia**, minister, Scientology Church in Argentina, in charge of Public Relations; **Eduardo Castro**, member of the Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue Commission of Buenos Aires Archdiocese; and **Julio Schlosser**, president of the Peace and Non Violence Commission of Buenos Aires City's Public Law School.

**Massimo Introvigne**, Italian sociologist, author of dozens of books, consultant and international lecturer on religious freedom, opened the panel by demystifying the term "cult," used to discredit communities for different interests from the status quo, with implications on the part of the media. In this respect, he mentioned the current cases in Japan and Germany, showing the effects that "hate speech and discrimination against stigmatized groups" can cause on "weak minds" (1).



"There is no coercion in religion," İsa Altekin quoted from the Qur'an, emphasizing Muslim teachings, among them the respect of freedoms: life, religion, family, intellect and property. Iya Adéwálé Eugenia Calvi addressed discrimination towards members of African-Umbanda beliefs. She recognized that, even though rights exist, they are not respected and never tend to be egalitarian, and ended her presentation with images showing the spine-chilling suffering of her enslaved ancestors in America, uprooted from their land and traditions. "2022 was the worst year for Christians around the world," stated Eduardo Castro, who claimed there were 5,600 murdered, 5,200 kidnapped and 4,500 arrested; and that from October 2021 and September 2022 more than 360 million people suffered high levels of persecution and discrimination: one in 7 Christians around the world.

"Why do religions need to be muzzled?" asked Scientology's representative **Susana Segovia**, who mentioned the efforts of her community to end religious discrimination around the world. Ms. Segovia, the co-founder of Ladies in Interreligious Dialogue (DDI), questioned materialism and consumerism, which destroy "the hope of men," while "spiritual practices lead humanity to find peace, fraternity....," she added.

The last speaker, **Julio Schlosser**, president of DAIA (Argentinian Israel Associations Delegation) from 2012-2015, suggested looking forward, "since we have a duty: to work for religious freedom, to work ahead....," he claimed. He pointed out that religious freedom "is a natural right that needs no legal recognition." In response to a comment from someone who argued the need of new laws, he ended with an interpellation to the mission and heart of religions and spiritualities: "Love is not created by decree," which led to applause from the audience.

The moderator was Ambassador for Peace **Andrea Fernández Bevans**, director of Communication and Public Relations in Buenos Aires Region of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She introduced every speaker with a brief comment on their work and, at the end, reviewed highlighted parts of every speech, including teachings from her own faith. Ms. Bevans invited panelists and participants to sign the "Declaration in support of fundamental human rights and human dignity, overcoming the threats to freedom of thought, conscience and religion," promoted by UPF in different international forums.

In conclusion, **Miguel Werner**, president of UPF-Argentina, thanked the panelists, participants and collaborators for their contribution to the event, which referenced Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion..." We specially thanked one of IAPD-Argentina representatives, **Inderveer Kaur**, vice president and Public Relations of the Sikh Dharma Temple in Argentina, and director of Acercando Naciones **Jorge Tuero**, representative of IAED-Argentina (2).

It is worth noting that the 2023 World Human Right Forum Argentina, which had hundreds of discussion panels and exhibitions from March 20 - 24 in four Buenos Aires venues in relation to the 40 years of democracy in our country, constitutes a space to address Human Rights around the world. This third edition was organized by the International Center for the Promotion of Human Rights, an entity originated from an agreement between the UNESCO and the Argentinian National State.

Here, UPF/IAPD-Argentina and Acercando Naciones made the proposal: "That representatives of different religious and laic communities or specialists can provide their knowledge, experience or testimony on the persecution they currently suffer in different regions of the planet through a Forum panel. Not only representatives of traditions coming from the Abrahamic branch, who equally suffer new waves of antisemitism, anti-Christianism and islamophobia, but also from more recent communities, less known or minorities, which are pestered, discriminated, arrested, banned and even murdered in countries on different continents: Sikhs, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, African-rooted traditions, world views from native peoples, Scientologists, Unificationists...



#### Quotes:

1) Speech by Massimo Introvigne published in Bitter Winter magazine: [bitterwinter.org/why-cults-and-brainwashing-do-not-exist/](https://bitterwinter.org/why-cults-and-brainwashing-do-not-exist/)

Portal report Acercando Naciones: [acercandonaciones.com/libertad-religiosa-es-un-derecho-humano-29032023\\_NEg1140Z2W](https://acercandonaciones.com/libertad-religiosa-es-un-derecho-humano-29032023_NEg1140Z2W)

2) "Religious Freedom" - Panel at Human Rights Forum - Part 1 – 22-3-2023: [youtu.be/cV8AGSy1lpA](https://youtu.be/cV8AGSy1lpA)

"Religious Freedom" - Panel at Human Rights Forum - Part 2 – 22-3-2023: [youtu.be/IreUApYb8k](https://youtu.be/IreUApYb8k)