

UPF Argentina: Peace Road Argentina 2023 - Forum on Religious Freedom

Miguel Werner
August 31, 2023



On August 31, 2023, the National University of La Rioja (UNLaR) hosted the academic inter-religious forum themed "Religious Freedom: A Right under Threat in the World." This significant event was a part of the PEACE ROAD 2023 initiative, centered on the foundational belief in the universal right to religious freedom as dictated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The event facilitated a platform where religious leaders and experts gathered to share their experiences and perspectives, both in person and online. Below are the insights shared by various speakers:

Dr. Roxana Khairallah and Mercedes Cáceres

At the commencement, Dr. Roxana Khairallah, Secretary of the UNLaR Extension, and Mercedes Cáceres, Dean of the Department of Human Sciences and Education at UNLaR, underscored the vital role of inter-religious dialogue in fostering peaceful coexistence and the holistic development of societal values and human rights. They urged for an increase in the visibility of such productive activities in future iterations.

Miguel Werner

Miguel Werner, the president of UPF Argentina, conveyed his appreciation for the project initiators through an online message. He outlined UPF's primary action lines and stressed the necessity for collective efforts in achieving the goals set by Peace Road. Highlighting the potential of unified endeavors under divine guidance, he quoted UPF's founder, "Where there is a will, there is a way."

Father Oscar Gabriel Díaz and Father David Cuello

Representing the Greek Orthodox Church of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Father Oscar Gabriel Díaz, and

Father David Cuello, both professors at UNLaR, shared their thoughts during the forum. Díaz spoke from an orthodox Christian standpoint, emphasizing religious freedom as a gift bestowed by God and a fundamental human right. He discussed various challenges faced by religious groups, including religious violence and state-imposed restrictions on religion.

David Jabif

David Jabif, the Director of the Jewish and Zionist Agnon Library of La Rioja, was also among the speakers who shared their perspectives during the event, emphasizing the need for peaceful inter-religious relations.

Dr. David Frol and Andrea Fernández Bevans

Introduced by Andrea Fernández Bevans from the Argentina 2023 Peace Route Follow-up Team, Dr. David Frol, the second vice-president of the Argentinean Council for Religious Freedom (CALIR), presented a report on the globally deteriorating condition of religious freedom.

Massimo Introvigne

Massimo Introvigne, founder of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR) and an expert in religious freedom with over 40 years of experience, highlighted the necessity to abolish harmful concepts like "sect" and "brainwashing." He advocated for a more respectful and understanding approach towards different religious groups to protect religious freedom and address real crimes effectively.

Video Messages From Various Dignitaries

The forum featured video inputs from a range of religious leaders, including:

- Monsignor Dante Gustavo Braida, Bishop of the Diocese of La Rioja
- Monsignor Pedro Torres, Bishop of the Diocese of Rafaela
- Father Federico Palacios, delegate of the Archdiocesan Commission of Ecumenism and Inter-religious Dialogue of Córdoba
- Monsignor Iosif Bosch, Archbishop of Buenos Aires
- Rabbi Marcelo Polakoff of the Centro Unión Israelita de Córdoba
- Lic. Mara Pedicino, Director of Worship of the Municipality of Córdoba

They offered their support and shared messages fostering peace and religious freedom.

Audience Participation and Cultural Interlude

Towards the end of the forum, the audience contributed their views and comments. Artists Yéssica Rezinovsky and the musical group Los Legales offered enthralling performances, including the song "Ruta de la Paz" by Gabriel Torino, culminating in a harmonious interfaith prayer.

Hosts: Javier Casco and Daniel Caniza

The event was facilitated by hosts Javier Casco and Daniel Caniza, students from UNLaR. Their efforts, coupled with those of the faculty and UPF Argentina, brought this forum to fruition, promoting dialogue in theology and comparative religions.

Closing Remarks

The *Peace Road* Argentina 2023, initiated with an art festival on July 29, aims to foster peace through various avenues, encouraging global collaboration to tackle pressing issues such as violence and climate change, thus promoting a peaceful and united world.