

International Day of Peace Observed in the United States

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Washington, D.C., USA—UPF and the Washington Times Foundation collaborated once again to organize an inspiring program in celebration of the U.N. International Day of Peace, on September 29, 2015, at the Washington Times.

Mrs. Tomiko Duggan, UPF director of public affairs, welcomed the guests and spoke about the significance of this day by reading words from U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon: “The Day offers an opportunity for the world to pause, reflect and consider how best to break the vicious cycle of violence that conflict creates. We must support, educate and protect each other from conflict, and help rebuild a universal culture of peace.”

She noted the U.N.’s efforts to bring world peace but also the suffering that continues to exist in the world today. She recounted a recent visit she made to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome), which was the only structure left standing in the city after the first atomic bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945. She related that devastation to the current Syrian refugee crisis, and asked, “How much more do we need to learn from the mistakes of history to...live in peace and happiness?”

After a short video about UPF’s work internationally, Mrs. Duggan introduced Mr. Larry Moffitt, vice president of the Washington Times Foundation, as emcee.

The first speaker was Dr. Manal Omar, acting vice president of the Center for Middle East and Africa at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), a nonprofit established by the U.S. Congress to increase the country’s capacity to manage international conflict without violence. Dr. Omar, who was in New York for a U.N. event, spoke through Skype. She offered her insights on “Partnerships for Peace--Dignity for All,” the theme of this year’s Day, which aims to highlight the importance of all segments of society to work together to strive for peace. To make aid to refugees more effective, local people should be consulted to know what resources and skills they need, she said. “We need to find and amplify [their] voices” to bring better results.

She further offered seven ideas:

One: “It is important to integrate young voices and the marginalized.” Two: “How to have legitimacy?” She suggests aid workers move outside of a country’s capital and meet people in rural areas because people in the capital do not necessarily reflect the voices of or have the same needs as the majority of the people in the country. She said, “Cairo, [for example], doesn’t represent [Egypt].” Third: “Understand the new face of peace and reconciliation—the role of religion, which can be a helpful partner. Religious leaders are emerging with a powerful voice; many are positive voices that can balance the negative ones.” Four: “How do we model peace itself?” In the case of Boko Haram, an extremist militant group based in Nigeria that has led violent uprisings and has carried out mass abductions of schoolgirls, military intervention was the immediate response. But it is not the best partnership for peace. Five: “Dignity for all and the role of women are essential [for peace].” The dynamics of power needs the full balance that women bring. Women build coalitions and more readily share power. They are in touch with the community, even going house to house, she added. In Iraq, women raised the red flags of concern about extremists before others were aware. “This is not just about women’s issues, it is about security,” she emphasized. More stability comes from women sharing power. Six: “It is important to hear the community to be effective.” People do not constantly need aid. If things are unnecessarily given to people, they feel a lack of dignity for not being able to be productive. Seven: “No matter what kind of humanitarian work we are doing, we must be aware of the political-economic situation in the country where the aid is being delivered. Political solutions are needed to [complete] humanitarian aid in a country,” she said.

She also said that conflict zones not only need humanitarian aid, but also a transitional justice plan that can lead the country or area to stability post-conflict. In the past, after humanitarian aid was delivered, solutions to the conflict or disaster were developed and, later, a form for a transitional government considered. These overlapping issues must be solved simultaneously “We need to challenge ourselves to focus on need not on the usual sequencing of aid,” she added.

When asked about the expulsion and killing of Christians and other minority religions, especially in Iraq, she answered that the international community must protect these groups of people. She said that it is not just Muslims who persecute. In Burma, for example, Christians persecute Buddhists. She said the international community and national governments need to emphasize non-violent solutions.

When asked about a U.S. presidential candidates' recent remark that no Muslim should be a president, she said that her parents travelled through five countries from Palestine before settling in South Carolina. She feels that her religion and the democratic principles in the U.S. of respecting all religions have merged. Those that come to the U.S. should learn from those who have already assimilated. "We are all a part of [this country], which respects all religions," she concluded.

The next speaker was Rev. Dr. Doris McGuffey, founder and CEO of the Center for Dimensional Transformation, which creates interfaith partnerships. Dr. McGuffey spoke on peace and the family. She said that "peace is like all the branches of a big oak tree, shooting out in many directions." She added, "Family is a relationship group with all different dynamics. Peace is more than freedom and the absence of war or hostilities between people of groups; it is expressing love for one another without limits or reservations." Referring to the story of creation in the Book of Genesis in the Bible, she said that God created the world in harmony, balance and togetherness. "He had an intention of peace, expressing beauty which can be seen through the words: It is good." He then created man and woman, giving them dominion over the world, she added.

She quoted from the inaugural address UPF founder, Rev. Sun Myung Moon, gave at the founding of UPF in 2005: "God's ideal family is a model for peace." Rev. Moon taught us that God ordained the purpose of the family is to relate through true love. He also taught us that the center of the universe is the "parent-child relationship of love, life and lineage." She said that our responsibility is to live a principled life where we embody God's divinity and inherit the creation. One way to do this is through spiritual practice, where families take care of each other.

She was raised on a humble farm and believed that her parents had children so they could work the farm. There was so much love in her family that no one ever felt want. It was only in her first job that she discovered that her family was considered poor. She also spoke about "Belief," a new television series created by Oprah Winfrey that explores humankind's ongoing search to connect with something greater than ourselves, and her work with it. She said it is important to know from where our beliefs came (e.g., from our experiences growing up) so that we can relearn the correct way to believe and feel in order to practice the principles of love, harmony and peace.

The third and final speaker was Hon. Todd Tiaht, a former U.S. House of Representative for Kansas (R-KS, 1995-2011). He began his talk by saying, "Our desire is a world of peace, surrounded by those we love, and to pass on this peace and prosperity to future generations."

Referring to the level of terrorism in the Middle East; Indonesia; Yemen; Iraq; the Philippines; and Syria, he said, "We can hardly comprehend the vastness of [the] violence [that is occurring]. This is our greatest challenge."

He commented on the recent visit of Pope Francis to Washington, D.C., where he spoke to the U.S. Congress. It was like a "blind date." He spoke about climate change to the Republicans, and the sacredness of marriage to the Democrats. "I think it was a good date!" he said. The Pope also talked about "loving your neighbor as thyself" and quoted the saying of Jesus that the greatest commandment is to love God, and to love others.

Hon. Tiaht shared that he lives by six pillars. He said that to really change the world, we need to change our own hearts.

The first pillar is to live a God-centered life. He quoted from American theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr's "Serenity Prayer":

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

And he expressed how useful this prayer is to guide our lives. Alcoholics Anonymous, an international mutual aid fellowship that helps alcoholics achieve sobriety, uses it to great effect.

His second pillar is to support strong families. His dream is for America to have a limited government and to be a country of strong families that can pass on good ethics to their descendants, and be productive through hard work. He said, "We need a healthy environment to support strong families." Today, however, "we have more drugs, lower grades, more conflict, more stress, and more violence in our culture." He lamented that our culture advocates a single lifestyle, not a family-centered lifestyle. "Even our tax code supports the single life," he added.

The third pillar is respect for the rule of law. Human rights are important for strong families. Life itself must have a high value, he added. He spoke about a recent incident where two teenagers fired shots into a car with two women in it, because when the boys demanded, "Get out and give me your car," the women

said “No.” They wanted to go on a joy ride, Hon. Tiahrt explained. This is a result of the decline of the family, he opined.

The fourth pillar is the right to private property, which is essential for a peaceful society, he said. He shared how tenants of a public housing building that had broken windows and graffiti cleaned it up, replacing the windows and painting it, when they became owners. The pride of ownership brings out the best in people.

The fifth pillar is to have a strong economy to protect families. In such an environment, there is freedom to do business, with equal opportunities for all; equal access and equal resources.

The sixth pillar is to create strong national security to protect families and allow them to develop themselves, and our nation. A strong government will follow when strong families are free to develop their talents and their “gifts.” He concluded by saying that “Without God as our center, we will not love others as [we love] ourselves.”

Afterwards, Mrs. Susan Fefferman, UPF-Washington, D.C.’s program director for Ambassadors for Peace, appointed five new Ambassadors for Peace, including Dr. McGuffey and Dr. Rosalyn King, professor of psychology at Northern Virginia Community College and chair of the board of the East Coast Colleges Social Science Association (ECCSSA), who brought with her four students to the program. Also appointed were longtime friend of UPF, Mrs. Sandy Taylor, president of the Young Musical Scholars Foundation, who is also a member of The Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide (AAFSW) and diplomatic liaison committee chair of the Welcome to Washington International Club; Ms. Miriam M. Debela, who works at the African Union (AU) in Washington, D.C., and previously worked for the AU Commission in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; and Congressman Tiahrt.

A toast to peace concluded the program.