

Youth UPF-Europe Holds Training in Sweden

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Kloten, Sweden - UPF-Europe hosted its first Youth Leadership Training in the scenic village of Kloten in Bergslagen, Sweden. Aug. 20-24, 2014. This training brought together young people from not only Scandinavia and other key European nations but also Russia and North Africa.

Altogether ten nations were represented: Sweden, Finland, Denmark, France, Germany, UK, Austria, Malta, Tunisia and Russia. There were 45 participants, including parents who came to help and support.



Since October 2011 and in different regions of Europe, Youth UPF has been bringing together young people to challenge themselves by going beyond national boundaries and social divisions within their societies. The aim of this workshop was to

1. Train the leadership in already active chapters
2. Initiate new chapters in the Scandinavian region
3. Develop European level Youth UPF projects

The schedule comprised mainly of four sessions a day combining lectures, mini-workshops and group discussions. An emphasis was put on making the sessions very interactive. The participants' active contribution in each session was key to the workshop's success. They all revolved around a shared theme of starting and developing UPF peace activities around Europe. Interspersed throughout the duration of the workshop were also reports on the various initiatives and projects from Youth UPF around Europe.



Combined with the lectures, which gave both the political and philosophical foundations for peace as well as the consensus on what peace is in world religions and the various interactive activities that focused on discussing relevant issues but also techniques for project-building, the workshop served as a good and general foundation for peace work for the attendees.



Participants appreciated and were inspired by the reports from the various Youth UPF branches; there was no flaunting of past achievements but rather good advice and inspiring ideas given in a free and open manner. The reports also served as a reminder to the leaders of the various Youth UPF branches of how important communication can be, as they became aware of how little they knew of UPF activities outside of their own country.



In the lecture on Political Conceptions of Peace, given by Joana Pereira, a clear and succinct explanation was given of how the philosophical narrative on the concept of peace has developed in the Western world since the time of the ancient Greeks up to our modern times. Joana also talked about her unique experiences working within the European Union as well as giving good advice on potential funding opportunities from the EU.



The presentation on Conceptions of Peace in World Religions gave an overview on various concepts of peace in different world religions. It started with an excellent introduction by Asuka Östberg, followed by group discussion on selections from the holy scriptures of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism,

Confucianism and Buddhism. There was an emphasis on trying to understand how the messages of the different religions were essentially unified, and how these universal messages could help people prepare internally for practical endeavors.



Mark Brann, secretary general of UPF-Europe, shared about the core principles and genesis of the Universal Peace Federation. He highlighted the successful contribution of UPF to peace and development in Nepal and shared from the recent Global Summit in Korea, thereby highlighting the direction that the work in Europe should take.



Bogdan Pammer gave an accessible introduction to the philosophical background of UPF in the thought of UPF Founder Dr. Sun Myung Moon. Father Moon's main philosophical framework revolves around peace and is oriented around the conception of history as a progression towards an ideal, through the providence of interaction between different societal strata (Individual - family - tribe - nation - world). Bogdan neatly described how the concept of an "ideal" and a divine providence tied into the core philosophies of UPF.

Throughout the workshop there were a lot of intense discussions both inside and outside of the schedule. In the session on What Challenges Do Our Societies Face? Hakim Salem organized the participants into small groups of think-tanks, tackling various social and political issues. In the session on My Foundation, led by Alexandre Huard, the participants reflected upon their personal plans and projects; this was followed by discussion in groups where everyone could exchange feedback.

The participants also enjoyed the Swedish wilderness. One activity was canoeing in a nearby lake. A few participants were lucky to be able to also see some elk.



Results

The leaders of the active chapters (Austria, France, Finland, Germany and UK) gained new resolve for their work and a clearer framework for interaction between each other. Support of individual chapters was established. The chapter leaders are now equipped with additional resources that can assist them in team management, event planning and educational work.

A young Ambassador of Peace in Denmark got inspired to start developing Youth UPF activities there.

Young people in Sweden, with the support of their parents in cooking, serving and transportation, etc., were inspired by the potential for UPF activities.

Project plans and timelines for European-level projects were for an EU-funded youth exchange among Baltic-Sea nations, a joint youth conference in Moscow, and a Religious Youth Service Project and education activities in Tunisia.

The workshop was a powerful kick-off for national and European Youth UPF activities in the academic year 2014/2015 towards the goal of raising well recognized national-level political, social and religious leaders in Europe in the coming years.

