

UPF International: Prayer, Restraint, and the Narrow Opening for Peace

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Pope Leo XIV called the faithful to Saint Peter's Basilica on April 11 as the Middle East searches for a path from fragile ceasefire to durable dialogue.

On Easter Sunday, Pope Leo XIV turned a liturgical appeal into a concrete public act. In his *Urbi et Orbi* message of April 5, 2026, he urged those with weapons to lay them down and invited the faithful to join him for a Prayer Vigil for Peace in Saint Peter's Basilica on Saturday, April 11. On April 8 he renewed that invitation after referring to the recent hours of great tension in the Middle East and throughout the world. Vatican News later clarified that the vigil would begin at 6:00 p.m. Rome time and would be open to all the faithful, whether present in person or following from home.

This makes the vigil more than a symbolic gesture. It comes at a moment when a two-week ceasefire has been announced and welcomed as an opening for diplomacy, yet the situation remains fragile. Reports indicate uncertainty over the scope of the truce, especially regarding Lebanon, and violence has not fully ceased. The Pope's intervention therefore reads as moral accompaniment to a diplomatic window, not as a declaration that peace has already been secured.

The language matters. Pope Leo's [Easter message](#) called for peace, not a peace imposed by force, but

through dialogue, and not with the desire to dominate others, but to encounter them. This is consistent with his [2026 World Day of Peace message](#), where he called for an unarmed and disarming peace and warned against the normalization of fear, rearmament, and religious language used to justify violence. In this perspective, prayer is not withdrawal from public life. It is a disciplined refusal of indifference.

That perspective intersects with the concerns of the United Nations. The [Secretary-General has welcomed the ceasefire](#) and called on the parties to respect international law and the terms of the truce in order to move toward a lasting and comprehensive peace. It also resonates with Sustainable Development Goal 16, which links peace, justice, and strong institutions. When diplomacy, international law, and moral witness move in the same direction, even a narrow pause in violence can become the beginning of something larger.

For UPF, this moment speaks to a long-standing principle. [Dr. Hak Ja Han](#) and [the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon](#) taught that durable peace requires a transformation of conscience and a recognition of humanity as one family under God. UPF's [Middle East Peace Initiative](#) and the [Interreligious Association for Peace and Development](#) reflect that conviction by bringing leaders in politics, religion, media, academia, business, women, youth, civil society, art and culture into spaces of dialogue that official politics alone often cannot sustain.

No prayer vigil can by itself resolve the wounds of the Middle East. Yet public acts of prayer can still matter when they strengthen restraint, humanize the suffering of civilians, and remind political leaders that military advantage is not the same as peace. At this delicate moment, the invitation issued from Saint Peter's Basilica points in a clear direction: protect life, return to dialogue, and enlarge the moral space in which reconciliation can still become possible.

The Universal Peace Federation welcomes this initiative and regards it as a meaningful contribution to the moral and spiritual work of peace. In that same spirit, UPF invites representatives of all faith traditions to stand together in prayer, solidarity, and renewed commitment to dialogue, so that the present opening may lead not only to a pause in violence but to a more enduring path toward reconciliation.



INTERRELIGIOUS ASSOCIATION FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

UPF maintains that any successful strategy for peace must take into account the spiritual dimension of our human identity, experience and interactions. Based on this worldview, UPF initiated the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development as a partner organization to the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace. Through interreligious dialogue and exchange of viewpoints among the world's religions and faith-based organizations, terrorism, violent extremism and the world's ills can be proactively addressed. Religious leaders are well-situated to deal with community-based concerns and can play a significant role in reconciliation and building a culture of peace. Due to their moral authority and emphasis on human rights based on the principle that we are one family created by God, religious leaders can help rebuild divided societies and assist in humanitarian services for the alleviation of hunger, disease and trauma due to violence and war. The world's religions and faith-based organizations can provide a unique set of valuable resources for achieving a just and peaceful world.

- [The Founding IAPD Resolution \(South Korea, 2017\)](#)
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Interfaith Iftar Meal Shares the Spirit of Islam



Washington DC Hosts Japanese & Pakistani Cultural Exchange



Dignitaries Mark World Interfaith Harmony Week at Peru Congress

Founding IAPD Resolution

November 10-14, 2017 at the Lotte Hotel World Seoul, South Korea

As participants in the Interreligious Leadership Conference sponsored by the Universal Peace Federation and the American Clergy Leadership Conference on November 10-14, 2017, focused on the theme, "Addressing the Critical Challenges of our Time: The Role and Responsibility of Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Organizations," we affirm the unique and essential role that religions are called to play in bringing about a world of lasting peace, a world in which people of all nationalities, ethnicities, races, cultures, and worldviews may live together in mutual respect, harmony and cooperation, as one family under God.

Throughout the ages religion has served as a guide to humanity, leading us from darkness to light, establishing the foundations of morality, and providing a vision of the good society. The teachings and scriptures of the great religious traditions are humanity's greatest treasures. We dishonor them at our peril.

We also recognize that persons within each of our religions have fallen short and failed to embody those universal ideals that are espoused within our traditions. Religion, too often, has given rise to conflict.

We resolve to overcome the divisive tendencies that have emerged within religion and to work to promote dialogue, mutual respect and cooperation so that we may more effectively work to solve the critical challenges of our time, including poverty, hunger, injustice, environmental degradation, family breakdown, corruption, conflict and violence.

Not only should religions cooperate with one another---Christian, Muslim, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, and others---they should also work together with the leaders of governments and civil society and the private sector, as partners for the sake of building the world envisioned by our founders, our ancestors, and, indeed, all people.

We applaud the leadership of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon and her late husband Rev. Sun Myung Moon for their vision and work over many decades to establish one family under God. On this day, November 13, 2017, we endorse the proposal to establish a new interreligious association, known provisionally as the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development.

Backgrounder and Purpose of the IAPD

According to the UPF founders, world peace can be attained only when the endeavors of the world's political leaders are supplemented by the wisdom and efforts of religious leaders. The world has shifted increasingly towards viewpoints that are materialistic and secular in nature, thus losing sight of the profound wisdom to be found in humanity's spiritual heritage. UPF maintains that any successful strategy for peace must take into account the spiritual dimension of our human identity, experience and interactions.

In addition, through interreligious dialogue and exchange of viewpoints among the various world religions, religious issues can be directly addressed in order to resolve the crises arising from terrorism, violence and religious extremism. Religious societies are also well-situated to deal with community-based concerns; they can be most effective in solving conflicts related to justice and the rule of law. Due to their moral authority and emphasis on human rights and human dignity, they can also play a key role in re-building shattered societies, and offering humanitarian services for alleviation of hunger, disease and trauma due to war. The combined work of all religions will once again make religion relevant in the daily affairs of humankind.

Launch of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD)

At the conclusion of the 2017 Interreligious Leadership Conference (November 13, 2017), more than 400 delegates including leaders of religious organizations and faith-based groups, parliamentarians, academics and other leaders, representing more than 60 nations unanimously resolved to form the IAPD as a new international association of religious leaders dedicated to bringing world peace.

On this historic occasion, Dr. Thomas G. Walsh, the chair of UPF International, served as the moderator. Dr. Michael Jenkins, the national co-chair of ACLC, read the statement made by UPF co-founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon on August 18, 2000, in which he called for the establishment of an interreligious council at the United Nations.

Interfaith prayers were offered by Bishop Jesse Edwards, a member of the executive board of ACLC (USA), Ven. Pramahaboonthin Taosiri, the president of the Thai Buddhist Society of Sweden, and Dr. Imam Umer Ahmed Ilyasi, the chief Imam of the All India Imam Organization, India.

IAPD Programs and Development

In 2018, inaugural conventions were held on six continents around the world. IAPD assembled global religious leaders and tapped into the profound wisdom found in humanity's spiritual heritage. Religious leaders and faith-based organizations provide the moral compass to deal with the social problems in contemporary society – sexual abuse and exploitation, crime, hunger, terrorism, and more.

Religious leaders and faith-based organizations are uniquely positioned to influence thinking, mobilize moral authority and be role models for others to follow. Most especially, religious leaders and faith-based organizations can help raise awareness as well as give moral guidance. By bringing together the different faiths and working together for the common good, IAPD stands at the forefront of a revolution of the culture of heart and filial love, and help usher in a world of lasting peace and happiness.

In 2018, the IAPD expanded and developed as a project of UPF. The newly formed organization initially focused on creating an international structure aligned with the principles for good governance and ethical practice. Two religious leaders will be selected to serve as IAPD International Co-Chairs along with 13 IAPD Regional Co-Chairs representing the following designated regions: Africa, Asia, Canada, Central America and the Caribbean, Eurasia, Europe, Greater China Region, Japan, Korea, Middle East, North America, Oceania, South America.

Conclusion

IAPD harnesses the goodwill and wisdom of the religions and faith-based organizations which are called to play a unique and essential role in bringing about a world of lasting peace, a world in which people of all nationalities, ethnicities, races, cultures and worldviews are called to live together in mutual respect, harmony and cooperation. UPF co-founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon describes the ideal world as "One Family Under God," and, teaching by example, says that the path to such a society is through people leading a life of true love and living for the sake of others.

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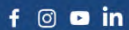
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