

## UPF Geneva, Switzerland's IAPD consultation held at World Council of Churches

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Geneva, Switzerland -- A consultation on creating a chapter of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) was held at the World Council of Churches offices.

The purpose of the half-day special meeting on May 31, 2018, was to discuss the background and reasons for the creation of such an organization and the extent to which a future launch of this project in Geneva was of particular interest. The gathering brought together around 40 personalities from Geneva and abroad, experts and representatives of various organizations, different faiths, academia and even politics.

After welcoming the participants, Mr. Heiner Handschin, the president of UPF-Switzerland and the director of the UPF Office for UN Relations, introduced Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, the regional chair of UPF for Europe and the Middle East, who indicated the need for such a consultation in order to start this important initiative inspired by UPF co-founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon.

After a few comments and reflections on the significance of Geneva as a city of a great interaction between the religious and political spheres, the first session and panel started.



Ms. Chantal Chételat Komagata, the secretary general of UPF-Switzerland, introduced the title and topic of the panel: "Beyond Differences of Ideology, Religion and Politics: IAPD, a Timely Initiative Dealing with the Challenges of an Increasingly Interdependent World." She mentioned that all societies have become increasingly multicultural and that greater challenges have become evident.

The panel featured leaders of international organizations, religion and civil society who offered their thoughts and experiences in surmounting the obstacles along the way.

The first speaker, Dr. Elmar Kuhn, the dean of world religions at the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, came especially from Vienna for this consultation, following the successful European-level inauguration of IAPD in Vienna on April 29. He emphasized the need for an organization like IAPD to act as a lighthouse in the dark and dysfunctional world.

Dr. Kuhn also spoke of the need for a vision, especially for the future generation who will have to deal with the fallout from the current problems. In a detailed presentation he made a call for action, in contrast to interreligious dialogue for the sake of dialogue. The time is right, he said, and there shouldn't be any further delay in having all sectors work together for the realization of a peaceful world.



Mr. Jacques Marion, the regional vice president of UPF for Europe and the Middle East, referred to the inaugurations of IAPD in Seoul, Korea, on February 19, as well as in Vienna on April 29, where more than 250 key leaders were present. Mr. Marion mentioned this timely initiative that UPF together with other partners was able to successfully introduce to large gatherings. He recognized the need for partnerships, greater cooperation beyond borders and fields of expertise -- as a framework to create such a sustainable body that could foster world peace and human development.

Dr. Astrid Stuckelberger, a health expert, author and lecturer at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Geneva, remembered various encounters with the late UPF co-founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon during his visits to Geneva from 2005 to 2011. She expressed her appreciation to UPF for its work for interreligious harmony and the protection of human rights and dignity. Mentioning ongoing interfaith activities, she pledged her interest and support for the new initiative of IAPD. She stressed the need for a scientific approach to solve differences, creating patterns that can be applied in various situations and parts of the world.



The final speaker of the panel was Maggid Kevin De Carli MA, the assistant rabbi of the Israelite Community of Baden. In a very enlightening presentation about the "tragedy" of interfaith dialogue, he showed the irreconcilable differences (unnecessary barriers) between various religions in understanding common and fundamental points like the Divinity, the human image and basic life goals. He emphasized that IAPD could represent the holistic approach needed to bring religions, politics, academia and the private sector together for the realization of the common goal of world peace.

The second session was titled "Religious Leaders and Politicians as Peacemakers: The Significance of Geneva as a Hub for Harmony, Development and Prosperity in the World." Mr. Michel Reymond, the vice president of UPF-Switzerland, led the panel and suggested that all participants of the consultation introduce themselves and briefly describe their interest in the theme. It was clear that all had deeply reflected and shared a deep concern for the vision.

The first speaker, Mr. Hafid Ouairi, the president and founder of the Fondation de l'Entre-Connaissance (Inter-Knowing Foundation) and a member of the Plateforme Interreligieuse de Genève, gave a few examples of the local interfaith cooperation that he experienced as spokesperson for the Islamic Center of Geneva, cooperating with Rev. William McComish, the dean of St. Peter's Cathedral of the Reformed Protestant Church of Geneva. Their shared concerns and activities brought them to a point of such understanding that they regularly preached to each other's community. He also testified to the ongoing cooperation with UPF and said he would like to be involved with a future IAPD, representing Islam.



The second speaker in the panel was Mrs. Carolyn Handschin, international vice president of the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), an organization affiliated with UPF, and director of the WFWP offices for UN relations. She suggested possible activities for a future IAPD in the Model UN Interreligious Youth Council project that has been organized and co-sponsored by the Geneva Interfaith Cultural Alliance in joint cooperation with UPF and WFWP. Among the various critical themes that were addressed within this program, emphasis was put on areas in which religion and politics share responsibility. Each "council" session was a real-life demonstration of how an interfaith body could cooperate within the UN system to solve global problems, acted out with brilliance by the young representatives of various faiths.

In a concluding session, Dr. Michael Balcomb, regional chair for Europe and the Middle East of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), another organization affiliated with UPF, launched a general debate with Dr. Elmar Kuhn about IAPD and the potential action steps to be taken. Future projects and mission statements were emphasized, as well as the need for partnerships to create an interreligious association with its own dynamics.

On a Geneva level, the suggestion was made that the people gathered in the audience be considered as a "steering committee" for the actual launch of IAPD on September 21, 2018, on the occasion of the International Day of Peace. The World Council of Churches was approved as a venue and plans were begun to create a one-day program with around 300 participants in the majestic large hall of the WCC building.

To close the event a group picture was taken.

