

UPF Bonn, Germany commemorates the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2021

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Bonn, Germany -- UPF in three German cities organized an online conference to commemorate the United Nations observance World Interfaith Harmony Week 2021.

The program on February 4 was organized by the Bonn/Cologne/Düsseldorf branch of UPF-Germany (upf-deutschland.de).

The event attracted an audience of about 80 participants, some of whom joined from outside Germany. Christian Haubold, a teacher of religious studies and history, was the moderator.

The panelists examined the theme of World Interfaith Harmony Week 2021 -- "Building Bridges across Borders" -- from the perspectives of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith.

As an introduction, Christina Partuschke from the Bonn chapter of UPF presented the basic principles of UPF, emphasizing the value of a life lived for the well-being of others and the fostering of international, interreligious activities and cooperation between people of differing worldviews.

Frank Bernhardt, a Lutheran theologian from Düsseldorf, spoke from his rich experiences in the area of interfaith. His conclusion was that we should not sweep differences of religious persuasion under the carpet but should give them a name and approach each other in full awareness of any differences. It is not enough to simply "put up with" the other, he said. In order to establish cordial relationships, respect and consideration are essential.

Representing the Mihr Foundation in Cologne, Ender Eker explained that this community which was established in Turkey does not put emphasis on its own teachings. Rather, it considers that since the time of Adam there has been only one religion with three books: Moses and the Torah, Jesus and the New Testament, and Mohammed and the Quran. Using quotations from these Holy Scriptures, he demonstrated that there is a common base which can open the way to peaceful coexistence (www.mihr-germany.com/).

Daniel Popescu from Düsseldorf has been a member of the Bahá'í Faith since 2008. In an impressive and concentrated manner he presented important basic points about his community of faith: the message of love and respect, equal rights, the harmony of unity and diversity, the complementary nature of science and religion, interreligious as well as world peace, a world-language as well as the mother tongue, and more (www.bahai.de/).

The participants made good use of the opportunity given after each presentation to ask questions and offer remarks. There were many constructive and lively comments and exchanges.

The final remarks were made by Bhante Samiddhi of the Samadhi Buddhist Meditation Centre (samadhi-meditation.org/) on the topic of anxiety. Especially in this time of global pandemic, people are concerned about their life situations and are dealing with loneliness. We all need affection and love, Bhante Samiddhi said. He spoke about empathy, encouraged us to discover our original goodness, recognize our value, develop positive feelings and strengthen our ability to express our appreciation for each other and ourselves as well as our environment.

This was also the content of his wonderful short meditation, which concluded the webinar in a spirit that was appropriate for World Interfaith Harmony Week.