

## UPF Amsterdam's meeting: The Netherlands and Suriname's Special Relationship

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Amsterdam, Netherlands -- The special relationship between Netherlands and Suriname was the topic of a lunch meeting and discussion.

The focus of the meeting, which was organized jointly by UPF and Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), an affiliated organization, was the special interreligious cohesion in Suriname, where different religions live peacefully and warmly together, and what this means for the association between religions in the Netherlands.

Among the 16 participants at the March 2, 2019, meeting were Pandit Shri Brahmishi Surindre Tewarie (a Hindu priest) and his wife; Dr. Willem van Eekelen (a former Dutch minister of defense) and his wife; Marlène Waal (a famous gospel singer); Abraham Fofana (president of the Liberian Association in the Netherlands); and Masae Schmitt (a WFWP volunteer who has worked in Suriname).

### Summary of speech by Pandit Tewarie:

*I was born in Paramaribo, Suriname. As I studied for pandit in India, I was sent to the Netherlands to set up a place where Hindu people could meet and worship together. Now we have a large Hindu center in The Hague. In daily life I work for the Ministry of Justice, precisely as a spiritual pastoral worker in Dutch prisons. So I usually have an audience different from you people here.*

*Suriname is one of the few nations where religions live together with a warm heart. It is true. Some years ago the city government of The Hague wanted to learn from Suriname's example, and I worked on a report about Suriname's society. Thanks to this report produced by the city of The Hague, Amsterdam and Rotterdam have followed as well. I was one of the delegates. After returning from Suriname, we set up many programs in the city of The Hague.*

*For instance, we have "Worldwide Knowing Day" every year in March, when all the religions and traditions open the doors to visit each other's temple/church/mosque, etc. The city of The Hague supports this program by giving free public transport tickets. All thanks to Suriname, indeed.*

*What's special about Suriname? There are so many different people, from Africa, Asia, etc., who each have their own tradition. But people have some realization that we are not alone here with our own identity but also with other people as inhabitants of Suriname. How can we all build a society together?*

*Even when the political situation is difficult, I have seen that, thanks to the religious leaders,*

*Suriname is going in a better and more hopeful direction. At present, Suriname is politically and economically isolated.*

*Thanks to UPF, we could help organize the Peace Walk of Gandhi in The Hague last year with the ambassador of India. We have been emphasizing that if you want to change the nation to a better direction, one needs to gather the religious leaders. This is exactly what UPF is trying as well, through many conferences promoting morals and values.*

*You see me, but you see only my outside: That's my hardware, my religion. But what you cannot see is my inside, my software. That is my spirituality. You might have a giant computer, but if you do not have software, nothing functions. The spirituality is inside you, not outside. What you see from outside is my religion.*

*"One is a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian, etc." But that's all just the outside, right? We give just a stamp. Holy books, holy rituals, all might be perfect, but if our inside is empty, then what? The spiritual side is the software. If we are honest, we have forgotten the software a little bit – inside ourselves.*

*If you do not update your software, you stay the same. To understand each other better and to live together, we need to update our software, our spirituality.*

*The Hindu Holy Scripture teaches about one human family, but most of us talk about it only theoretically and do not even think of realizing it. But Father and Mother Moon have been seriously working to realize this ideal. That's why I truly respect Father and Mother Moon.*

*I have attended many UPF conferences and have been to Korea. We have received the [Marriage] Blessing from Father and Mother Moon. I am happy to be able to work together with Mother Moon now, to realize one human family, which Hindu Scripture talks about.*

*Thank you.*

Additional quote: "If a religion doesn't work for peace, it might as well not exist."



One young participant reflected: "It was a wonderful day. I learned a lot. It was very well spoken about peace and how to achieve it. The idea of all the religions living together in peace gave me the most inspiration. Suriname has shown that it is, in fact, possible. Father and Mother Moon must be truly strong people who have created this peace movement. I never heard of their names, but I would like to learn more about them. How wonderful it would be if we could live in love and peace with each other instead of killing each other! I respect you all that you are fighting for the ideal."

Mrs. Masae Schmitt, a volunteer with Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) in Suriname, gave a moving story about her experience there. In Suriname, people warmly welcomed her and were hospitable. Indeed, she was impressed that people from different religions were living together peacefully and were celebrating each other's festival days. In the forest she met a medicine woman, who prepared something for her for good health. She helped to organize meetings to promote peace, which were inspiring and have given her good memories from Suriname.