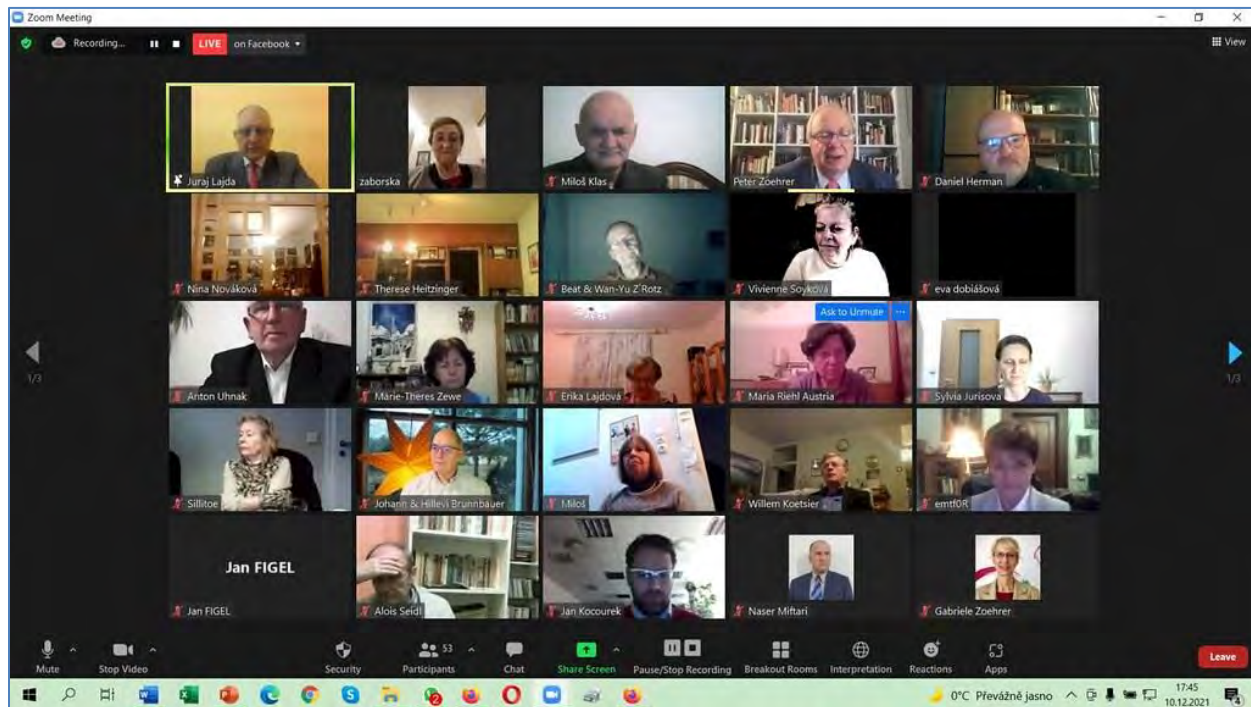


## UPF and IAPD Czech Republic United Nations Human Rights Day Webinar

Juraj Lajda  
December 10, 2021

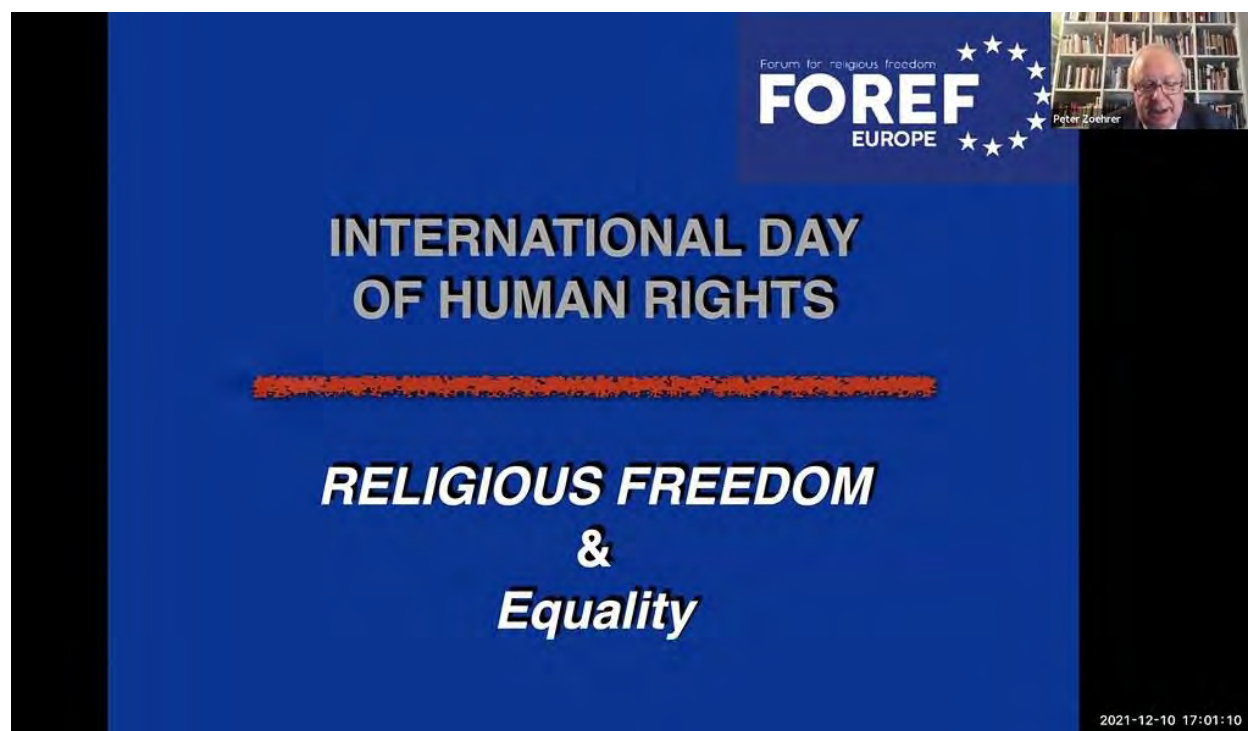


Prague, Czech Republic -- Five prominent speakers from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria participated in a webinar commemorating Human Rights Day.

Nearly 70 people from five countries viewed the webinar "Religious Freedom as the Fundamental Human Right," which was held on December 10, 2021, by the Czech and Slovak chapters of UPF and its Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD).

As the moderator, Dr. Juraj Lajda, the president of UPF in the Czech Republic, reminded the audience that in many countries there are people who are persecuted because of their faith.

There is a close relationship between human rights and religious freedom, Dr. Lajda said. Religious freedom should guarantee the right to practice one's faith. Totalitarian regimes try to marginalize religious freedom because they want to have control over people's minds. Therefore, it is important to deal with religious freedom.



The first speaker, Hon. Nina Nováková, a member of Parliament of the Czech Republic and president of the non-profit organization Central European Inspiration, expressed her appreciation for the work of UPF, which she said is faithful to its mission. Every year UPF remembers Human Rights Day, she said, and is

working continuously in a humble and patient way.

Religious freedom is not guaranteed in many nations, Mrs. Nováková said. We have a secular state on one hand and religious belief on the other. The secular state guarantees the right to affiliate with some spiritual or religious community. The state cannot interfere with freedom of thought, but practicing a religious life is in a real time and space where the state can interfere.

The secular state is in crisis today, Mrs. Nováková said. It does not wish that absolute values should exist, the values that extend beyond the state control and which the state cannot influence.



The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognized these values. It was an act of great humility and also of great courage to try to understand the universal principles of humankind, she said.

Freedom of thought and religious belief cannot be denied by the state, she said. However, this freedom cannot be separated from another freedom: that is, the freedom of speech and the right to practice one's own faith.

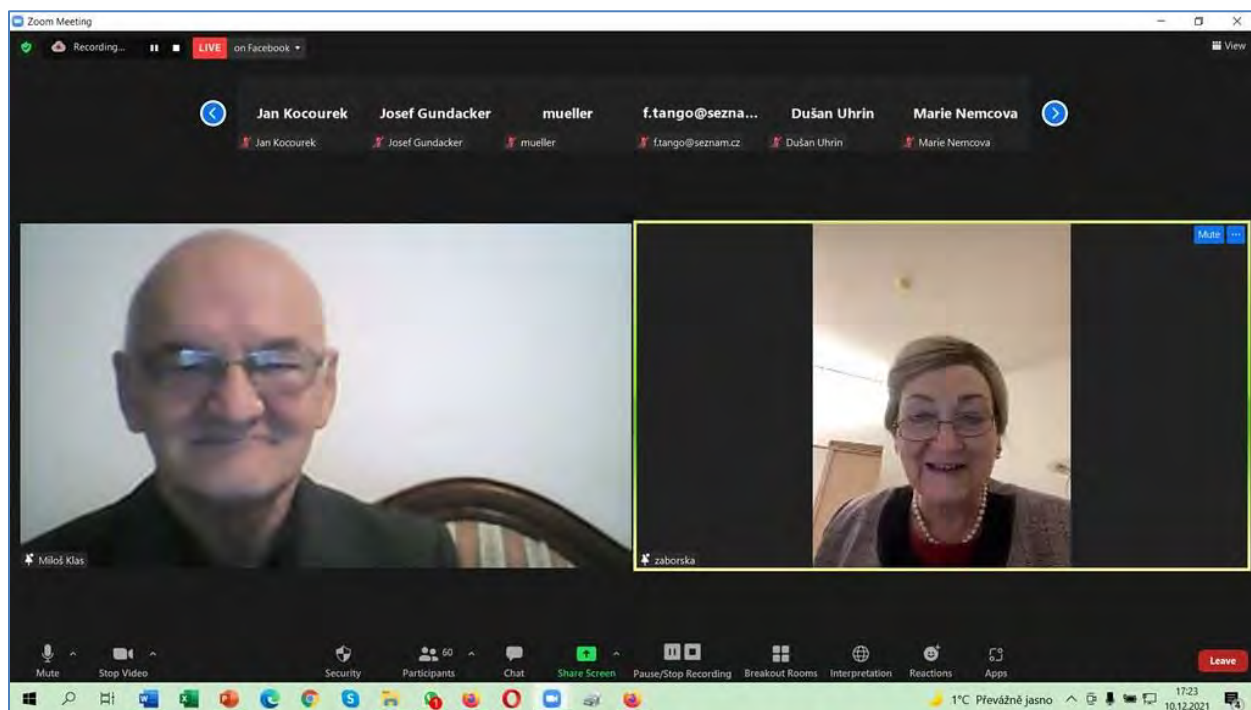


The modern state is comfortable with a citizen who is reduced and whom the state can adjust to its own image. Martin Luther in the 16th century reminded us of this danger with the phrase Incurvation in se which means a life lived "inward" for oneself rather than "outward" for God and others.

Hon. Anna Záborská, a member of the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic and government commissioner for freedom of religion and belief, said that it is important to speak about religious

freedom, especially at the present time. When religion and faith disappear from the public space and public life, we lose a compass. Secular humanism will remain, which finally also will disappear because human secularism itself has no moral compass and without religion cannot survive.

Mrs. Záborská mentioned the case of a Finnish politician, Päivi Räsänen, a conservative and a Christian, who has been charged with incitements against a minority group after expressing opposition to the Evangelical Lutheran Church supporting gay pride events. In Slovakia the Lutheran Church raised a voice for religious freedom and defense of religious freedom. Mrs. Záborská said the worst is when people keep silent even in situations that violate freedom of faith and conscience.



In Slovakia there is an office of a government envoy for religious freedom. Freedom of faith is a fundamental universal right, and it cannot be negotiated, Mrs. Záborská said.

Hon. Daniel Herman, a member of the Czech Government Council for Human Rights and a former Czech minister of culture, said that he comes from the Judeo-Christian tradition which influenced his life.

Not everywhere in the world is there respect for human right, he said. One third of a billion people in the world are persecuted because of their faith. Why is it so? Why is religion a thorn in the eyes of totalitarian regimes? Above all, spiritual and internal stability can balance the instability in life. It is the totalitarian states that try to undermine the internal integrity of people. Religious freedom is the litmus test of a society's freedom.

Mr. Herman mentioned Pope John Paul II, who said that terrorism in the name of God is a denial of the principles of spiritual thinking and is counterproductive. We should be in solidarity with those who are deprived of religious freedom. Mr. Herman mentioned some nations where human rights are violated and where religious minorities are persecuted.

Hon. Ján Figel' of Slovakia, the European Union special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion outside the EU (2016-2019), said that religious freedom and UPF come together. UPF always points out the importance of peace.

Peace cannot be taken for granted, Mr. Figel' said. Peace is a fruit of justice, and therefore we need more justice in the world to have more peace. The essence of peace is respect for fundamental human rights, and the core of human rights is freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Religious belief is the deepest expression of the human personality.

Hon. Figel' spoke about three topics: the importance of religious freedom, the current situation, and what should be done. Religious freedom touches human thought and conscience, and therefore it is important to deal with it, he said. Support for religious freedom is a criterion of civilization and its goal. If religious freedom is respected, the society is closer to bringing dignity for everybody. Justice for everybody brings sustainability in the society.

Concerning religious freedom, Mr. Figel' said we are living in a global crisis. The statistics say that about 79 percent of the world's population are living in countries where there are big obstacles to religious freedom. The trends are worsening. Animosity, intolerance and violence, discrimination, persecution and genocide are the worst phenomena of today's situation.

Mr. Figel' said it is necessary to create a deeper awareness of religious freedom and to develop efforts for positive change. It would be good to create a global movement for religious freedom. Finally he recommended that religious communities should have religious social responsibility. There is a healthy secularism that leads to pluralism and an unhealthy secularism that leads to a state ideology.



Peter Zoehrer from Austria, the executive director of the Forum for Religious Freedom (FOREF), referred to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." Mr. Zoehrer mentioned other human rights declarations, such as the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam.

Mr. Zoehrer said that in Europe there are not only Catholics, Orthodox believers and Protestants but also Muslims. Equality should be for everybody, he said. Christianity in the Middle East experiences persecution. He mentioned Pakistan, which has a law prohibiting blasphemy. In China, Christianity is spreading fast, especially Protestantism. There is also persecution in Africa. In Europe, Christian values are under attack. There is a big discussion about abortion. Also anti-Semitism is on the rise in Europe, Mr. Zoehrer said. He referred to the Austrian poet and writer Ingeborg Bachmann, who said, "History teaches us constantly but sadly finds no students."

In the end Mr. Zoehrer mentioned the biblical concept of Imago dei (humans are created in the image of God), which served as a guiding principle for the abolitionist movement in Britain in the 18th century.

After the speeches, Miloš Klas, president of UPF-Slovakia, moderated a discussion.

All the panelists expressed their appreciation for the webinar, and many responses from the viewers were also positive. The webinar was in Czech and Slovak languages with interpretation into English.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aap8Y8GhqJk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aap8Y8GhqJk)

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