

2017 Interreligious Leadership Conference -- Executive Summary

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Interreligious Leadership Conference 2017

"Addressing the Critical Challenges of Our Time: The Responsibility of Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Organizations"

Universal Peace Federation and American Clergy Leadership Conference
Lotte Hotel World, November 10-14, 2017, Seoul, Korea

"Religious people, whose mission is to lead humanity into the ideal world, must not forget for a moment that truly their only mission is to be apostles of peace."

~ Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon,
As a Peace-Loving Global Citizen,
Co-founder with Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon
of the Universal Peace Federation

Executive Summary

Seoul, Korea: Religious leaders and representatives of faith-based organizations concluded an international conference co-hosted by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) and the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC). The Interreligious Leaders Conference (IRLC) assembled from November 11 to 14, 2017, at the Lotte Hotel World to discuss "The Responsibility of Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Organizations in Addressing the Critical Challenges of Our Time."

Main highlights

1. The conference brought together a selective group of approximately 400 religious leaders and representatives of faith-based organizations from 60 nations to dialogue, not on matters of doctrine but on issues of mutual concern and how we can collaborate to bring about peace for the 5 billion people in the world.
2. The 2017 Global Rally for the Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula, which took place on November 11 at the Seoul World Cup Stadium, brought together almost 60,000 people.

Ambassador R. James Woolsey Jr., a former director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, said: "We never forget that what divides North and South in this country is an artificial and arbitrary political wall of tyranny. All the men, women and children of the Korean Peninsula are one people, and they have been for some 4,000 years. ... You have existed as one family since the dawn of recorded history, and you will continue as one family for millennia to come." Other speakers included: Bishop Don Mearns, Evangel Cathedral (USA); Archbishop Dr. Johannes Ndanga, Apostolic Christian Council (Zimbabwe); and Rev. Dr. Marcus Braybrooke, World Congress of Faiths (UK).

Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the co-founder of UPF and ACLC, delivered the keynote speech, declaring that our hope is to see North and South Korea become one, and to live in that peaceful, unified country. This hope is something that cannot be achieved through political power, religious power or the power of an ideology, Dr. Moon said. This can be resolved only by people leading a life of true love for the sake of others, she declared.

3. A resolution to establish the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) was unanimously endorsed. The new association "affirms 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 live together in mutual respect, harmony and cooperation, as one family under God."



More than 60 speakers addressed many of the world's crises, including: poverty, lack of education, disease, terrorism, climate change, population growth, and human and drug trafficking. More current issues also were addressed, such as the Rohingya Muslim refugees from Myanmar and Europe's migrant crisis, but most centrally, the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

Several faith-based organizations were highlighted, including: the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina; the Confederation for Religious Freedom, Conscience and Worship of Colombia, which helped broker a peace agreement between the government and the FARC leftist rebel group; and the Geneva Spiritual Appeal.

As a response to these global crises, UPF presentations were given on various relief and humanitarian programs, service-learning projects, and character education programs, including: International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP), Northeast Asia Peace Initiative (NEPI), Peace Road, Sunhak Peace Prize, Youth and Students for Peace, Korean Religions Association, Women's Federation for World Peace, and the Interfaith Blessing Movement.

Several themes were common to these presentations: Lasting peace will not be achieved through political, diplomatic and economic efforts alone. A just and lasting peace among all peoples and with all nations will only be built centered on spiritual values when absolute love and living for the sake of others are practiced.

Further: The key to lasting peace is leaders who are honest and trustworthy and have sound moral and ethical principles that are universal and transcend national boundaries. And in a world that grows smaller and more connected every day, leaders need a global altruistic perspective.

Next year will mark the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. The IRLC discussed the need to support the United Nations and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by partnering with faith-based organizations that work internationally: the Parliament of the World's Religions, or Religions for Peace, the King Abdullah International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, or United Religions Initiative, etc.

Participants called for a worldwide recognition that the standard of true ethics upholds understanding, tolerance, and the fulfillment of human potential. The religious leaders said we must find ways to positively influence young people, women and those in leadership positions. Knowledge based only on secular thinking is influenced by special interests and narrow-minded agendas and is doomed to temporal, short-term solutions, but sacred wisdom that dates back thousands of years is rooted in God's unconditional love.

True leadership recognizes God as eternal, unchanging, absolute and unique. The starting point toward resolving the problems faced by humankind requires a perspective and vision based upon universal, shared values such as benevolence, helpfulness, honesty, forgiveness, loyalty, responsibility, friendship and humility. The way to true peace begins with the recognition that humanity is created in the image of God and that therefore people of all races, colors, religions, nationalities, creeds and genders have innate divine and spiritual value.

Participants called upon the world's religious leaders to become role models, to practice the Golden Rule and cultivate the quality of empathy by living for the sake of others, whether a neighbor who lives across

the street or across the national border. The responsibility and mission of religious leaders and faith-based organizations is to practice absolute faith, absolute love, and absolute obedience, and to educate the leaders of our nations and our youth to work in every way possible toward building one global family centered upon the unconditional love of God.



In terms of the contribution of religious leaders and faith-based organizations and ways to resolve conflict, many recommendations were discussed. Two are highlighted below:

Dr. Elmar Kuhn, the dean of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, Austria, outlined six common gateways of religious contributions to society:

- True thoughts (authentic knowledge and practice of faith, dedicated to rationality and emotion, exchange with natural science)
- Purification techniques (such as fasting periods)
- Unconditional giving (works of mercy)
- Experience of transcendence
- Mindfulness and mantra
- Physical activities (prayer position, yoga)

Dr. S.B. Radebe Mbiza, prophet, the Revelation Church of God, South Africa, gave five keys to resolving religious conflict:

- Embrace spirituality as universal above any religion or doctrine
- Exercise love and humility
- Focus on the end goal of connecting to God
- Practice acceptance and tolerance
- Encourage constant engagement between religious leaders on issues of spirituality

Conclusion

The 2017 Interreligious Leadership Conference was a meaningful gathering experience. It generated enthusiasm through interaction of different cultures and interreligious dialogue of people of different faiths. It became quickly apparent, at both the individual and institutional level, that it is important to remain true to our own beliefs and that we should respect the beliefs of others. Though the religions and faith-based organizations make significant contributions, new levels of outreach are accessed when our energies are pooled together. As one participant said: "Our strength is and will be our unity."

The 4-day program successfully concluded: (1) the IRLC 2017, (2) the Rally for the Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula, and (3) resolved to establish the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD). Participants described the events as "a time of renewal and awakening" and affirmed that religious leaders and faith-based organizations must work together with one voice to address the critical challenges of our time and truly transform this world.