UNIVERSAL PEACE FEDERATION – DEUTSCHLAND e.V. (UPF)
Föderation für Weltfrieden · www.upf-deutschland.de · www.upf.org

General
Consultative
Status bei
ECOSOC

UPF talk given on the International Day of Peace

‚The affirmation of religious and ideological diversity as guarantee of social peace’

24 September 2022

The third webinar in the series of 'Peace Talks' took the motto of this year's UN Day of Peace, 'End Racism, Build Peace', as an impulse to address the role played by religion in world peace, and in particular to emphasise the importance of affirming religious and ideological diversity in contributing to peace in society.

This hour long event, which was organised in cooperation with the House of Religion in Stuttgart, attracted an audience of over more than 100 via zoom.

To start off, Karl-Christian Hausmann, chairman of UPF Germany, explained the meaning of a previously shown video. In a so-called 'water ceremony' representatives of different religious communities empty their water jugs into a common container to demonstrate the necessity of inter-religious cooperation, since no one religion is in sole possession of the truth.

Hausmann then went on to quote from a speech delivered by the founder of UPF, Dr. Sun Myung Moon, at the Assembly of World Religions in November 1985, in which he called upon religious leaders to give preference to lively communication with God rather than to arguments about theological details: 'In God's parental heart and in His great love, there is no discrimination on the grounds of skin colour and nationality, nor are there barriers between countries and cultures'. Hausmann cited the book project 'World Scripture'(a comparative anthology of sacred texts) and the proposal to establish an interreligious council as an independent body of the United Nations, as examples of Dr. Moon's commitment to world peace through interreligious cooperation.

It is urgent that we understand and appreciate the spiritual dimension of human existence, said Hausmann, since 84% of the world's population claims to have a religious identity or affiliation. But it is of concern that 79% of these live in countries with high, or very high barriers to religious freedom. Therefore, it is imperative to call for an international religious climate change on the Day of Peace. This is totally in line with UN-General Secretary António Guterres, who was also quoted in the invitation: '[true peace] requires the establishment of societies in which all members have the feeling that they can flourish'.

The next speaker, Matthias von Sarnowski, freelance trainer and coach for religious and ideological diversity, has studied comparative religions, intercultural communication and cooperation as well as mediation, and is an ambassador in the Foundation for Global Ethics. He works as a coach, supervisor, mediator and moderator in adult education, prevention of radicalisation and the so-called intercultural opening.

Sarnowski began by remarking that 'a Day of World Peace, representing peace for all, from peaceful coexistence with neighbours and those closest to us, right up to world peace and the end of all
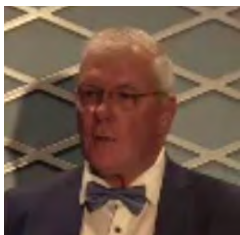
wars, would truly be a reason to celebrate in society together, visibly, profoundly and permanently' and he regretted that this day is so little know. Most of the public holidays in Germany come from a Christian tradition, but even many Christians no longer know their deeper meaning.

Over the last 150 years, the religious and ideological composition of German society has fundamentally changed, explained Sarnowski. In 1871, when the German Empire was established, 98.5% of the population were either Protestant-Lutheran or Roman Catholic, whereas today this figure is only 49.7%; the other half are of different religious or non-religious beliefs and denominations. Nevertheless, the traditional patterns of thought have been preserved in society with most taking a two- or three direction division such as Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Christians, atheists and Christians, or Christians, Jews and Muslims.

Sarnowski pointed out the phenomenon by which each community sees only itself and a few others and shows solidarity with one but not the other. Such ,hypocritical dialogue' led to common ground and peace, but also to conflict due to the exclusion of others. Conscious selection can only produce new factions for socio-political power struggles and no true peace. As Hans Küng said there will be ,no world peace without peace amongst the religions.'

An obvious example of selection is exclusive interreligious dialogue between the two major churches and official Muslim and Jewish groups, where all others are excluded. Excluded are those who are supposed to serve as an enemy image, those who do not fit into an appropriate world view and those who are simply ignored because they are small and have no lobby. Sarnowski called for an end to ,the exclusive interreligious dialogue' between ,always the same , exclusively chosen communities' and to encourage true peace by affirming the entire religious-ideological diversity, as some houses and councils of religion in larger cities are already doing.

In conclusion, Sarnowski expressed the desire for an inclusive dialogue in society as a whole, in which injustices and conflicts that are grounded in religion and ideology can be considered, discussed and resolved, a new subject in schools where this diversity is recognised, and common holidays that would create and maintain social peace and cohesion.

The final speaker was Hubert Arnoldi, representing UPF Stuttgart, who introduced the House of Religion in Stuttgart, of which he is co-founder and chairman. The House of Religion ,should be a base for all people, regardless of ethnicity, religion or philosophy, where a solution for social problems can be developed in a common dialogue', explained Arnoldi.

The House of Religion was officially established in 2011, having developed from the Interreligious Roundtable. The members promote respectful and peaceful exchange according to the motto ,in my father's house there are many mansions', or 'unity in diversity'. The desire is to have an impact on society as offering a visible place where people of different cultures and religions can meet, live with each other and learn from each other. 'Here we can freely and informally draw from all of God's sources. Every religion and ideology is welcome here' asserted Arnoldi, ,because we need each other, no one is dispensable.' Each person and religion is unique and a valuable part of the whole.'

The goals and activities of the House of Religions include:

- to get to know each other as fellow humans and as religious communities.
- to help each other to break down prejudices.
- to set up book tables on the street.

- to help each other to be acknowledged, respected and taken seriously in the neighbourhood and by the media
- to visit educational events together
- to visit religious communities in their own premises in order to get to know and appreciate them, as well attending lectures, seminars and zoom conferences
- to organise together events for the UN-Days of the Family, Peace, Human Rights as well as World Interfaith Harmony Week etc.
- to study together the book „World Scripture", in order to uncover similarities and to develop mutual respect and unity.

The House of religion has 4 pillars: 1. The document 'Creating Trust' which was adopted at the Ecumenical Church Convention in Munich 2. Interreligious guidelines (both can be found under www.haus-der-religion-stuttgart), 3. The resolution on human responsibility, 4. World Scripture.

Following the speeches, the moderator Estella Haubold, representing the association „Youth and Students for Peace ". opened the floor for questions and answers. The questions from the audience deepened and clarified what had been said, and was confirmation that the plan to conduct inclusive interreligious and intercultural dialogue as a means to achieve lasting peace is needed and timely.

The event was brought to a close with a preview of the next Peace Talk, which will be held at the Frankfurt Book Fair on Saturday 22. October and transmitted live via zoom.

Link to recording of this webinar: https://youtu.be/t-CuFDT3ouA

Report: Hildegard Piepenburg (English: Catriona Valenta),