

UPF Toronto, Canada Hosts Ambassadors for Peace Awards Banquet

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Toronto, Canada -- On a beautiful autumn day, October 23, 2022, in Toronto, Canada, Universal Peace Federation members and friends gathered for the first time in person since January 2020 for the most joyful evening in almost three years. Prior to this event, UPF Toronto Region's last Awards banquet experienced 2020's heaviest snowstorm and the beginning of the COVID pandemic just as it began to sweep the land! On this day, however, there was a sense of celebration in the air at the Mississauga Grand Banquet Hall as almost 250 Ambassadors for Peace (AFP), UPF members, friends and guests came together to honor three outstanding Canadians (all women, and all immigrants) with the UPF's Ambassador for Peace Service Awards, as well as to appoint nearly 40 new AFPs.



The evening was truly a Canadian multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, interreligious display of the unity, goodwill and peace that is UPF's aspiration for our world, and its signature quality. Master of ceremonies **David Stewart**, ably assisted by **Angela Fontaine**, introduced the program which opened with the moving Water Ceremony, bringing together a diverse group of religious and ethnic community leaders. **Dr. Moonshik Kim**, UPF-Canada chair, continued this theme in his welcoming remarks, expressing the sentiment that "Canada is a country that embraces UPF's ideal to pursue interdependence, mutual prosperity and universally shared values." His thoughts were echoed in the warm congratulatory remarks conveyed by letter from **Prime Minister Justin Trudeau** and various Toronto Members of Parliament, in a video by Ontario Premier **Doug Ford** and in person by Member of Provincial Parliament **Sheref Sabawy**, who stayed through the entire program.

Two teenage Filipinos sang the inspiring UPF anthem, "Where Peace Begins," elevating the atmosphere in preparation for UPF International chairman **Dr. Thomas Walsh's** keynote presentation. His powerful series of slides of recent UPF events complemented a thorough, yet brief, explanation of the extraordinary depth and breadth of our global activities.

During the dinner which followed, all could enjoy ethnic entertainment from local singers and dance groups from the Nepalese and Colombian communities, and as well, renew relationships and make new friends after the long COVID hiatus.

Following dinner, **Dr. Franco Famularo**, UPF-Canada president, gave an uplifting and comprehensive explanation about the AFP program. He was then joined by **Dr. Walsh, Dr. Kim** and other UPF representatives to honor the three awardees for their contributions, respectively, in the realms of community activism, service and a lifetime of public leadership. Short, very moving videos were shown about each of their lives, to which each added words of gratitude and wisdom after receiving their awards.



The program ended with **Norma Carpio**, 2019 Most Influential Filipina Woman in the World Awardee, UPF Award recipient in 2020 and president of the Ontario Ambassadors for Peace, thanking all for coming and exhorting all to continue, expand and improve the excellent work of UPF! Then the singing and dancing began.

The three awardees:

Agnes Miranda, driving force and current president of the Philippines Independence Day Council, has continuously built bridges and provided opportunities for Filipino-Canadians to promote and embrace Filipino culture through her community programs, fundraising events and charity works, for which she has received multiple honors and recognitions.

Phymeann Noun, a Khmer and winner of the World's Children's Prize in 2015, survived Pol Pot's "Killing Fields" as a child, then was a teenage orphan caring for a younger niece. While working for the UN in Phnom Penh in 2002 she met children scavenging the dumpsites, begging for chicken bones. Immediately she gave up her job, sold her home and began her first school on a garbage dump for these, the poorest, most disadvantaged. Today there are three such schools serving over 1500 women and children, sustained by Ms. Noun's continuing selfless investment.

The Hon. Dr. Jean Augustine, born in Grenada, came to Canada to study education, became a teacher, then a principal. Always socially involved, in 1973 she founded the Toronto branch of the Congress of Black Women of Canada, becoming the national president in 1987. In 1993 she made history as the first African Canadian woman to be elected to the House of Commons and subsequently, a cabinet minister. Her legacy includes the placement of the *Famous Five* statue on Parliament Hill in Ottawa and introducing the parliamentary motion that created Black History Month in Canada. She was Minister of Multiculturalism and the Status of Women, a champion of the cause of single mothers raising children, her own experience. Awarded the Order of Canada in 2009, she retired, after her long and illustrious career, as Ontario's Fairness Commissioner in 2015, and her name lives on in the numerous educational institutions and, so far, two parks named in her honor. A recipient of no fewer than seven honorary doctorates, UPF's award represents our thanks for her faithful support over many years, in addition to the recognition deserved for a distinguished life of service. This year, a documentary has been made of her contribution to the building of a modern embracing, multi-cultural Canada, entitled *Steadfast: The Jean Augustine Story*.