

UPF Central America & Caribbean: Responsibility of Religious Leaders for Peace

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The Responsibility of Religious Leaders for Peace and Development

Dr. Charles S. Yang
Chair of Universal Peace Federation Central America and Caribbean. He led Universal Peace Federation's Middle East Peace Initiative for ten years.

Dr. Taj Hamad
Vice President of Universal Peace Federation International and the Coordinator for IAPD International, USA.

Dr. Remy Taupier
Director of UPF in St. Lucia. He is working to strengthen families as an essential way to deal with poverty, violence and crime in the nation.

Bishop Mary McFarlane
Spiritual Baptist Faith, Pastor of St. Francis House of Prayer. She has represented the Spiritual Baptist Faith nationally and internationally, St. Lucia.

Imam Aakil Bhula
Imam of Jama Masjid Mosque. Since 2007, he has been Imam of Jama Masjid, Barbados, the oldest Mosque in the Island, Barbados.

Rev. Satordino Cerrato
Director of the Ministry of the Assembly of God, since February 1998. Performing different functions such as Pastor, Priest, Director of the Biblical Institute and National Superintendent, Nicaragua.

Rev. Dr. Joseph RAI
Priest of St. Michael Church, St. Lucia Moral Theologian, Canon Lawyer & Judicial Vicar, St. Lucia.

Pastor Jorge Maturrita
Pastor Evangelist and Director of the Christian Ministry of Peace. Graduated in Accounting and Business Administration and was a university professor, Costa Rica.

Pastor José Yvan Rodríguez
Currently Pastor of FFPUM and Vice President of the Heavenly Parent's Holy Community in Cuba, served as an evangelical Christian Minister in the Biblical Assembly of Jesus Christ in Cuba, Cuba.

Interreligious Association for Peace and Development
Through interreligious dialogue and exchange of viewpoints among the world's religions and faith-based organizations, terrorism, violent extremism and the world's ills can be proactively addressed. Religious leaders are well-situated to deal with community-based concerns and can play a significant role in reconciliation and building a culture of peace.

Central America and the Caribbean -- On February 25, 2021, the regional chapters of UPF-Central America and the Caribbean and the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) held a webinar on the theme "The Responsibility of Religious Leaders for Peace and Development." To see a video of the webinar, [click here](#).

The moderator, Pastor Remy Taupier (Director, UPF, St. Lucia), explained that IAPD is an association of UPF. Any successful strategy for peace must take into account the spiritual dimension of our human identity, experience and interactions, he said. The world's religions and faith-based organizations can provide a unique set of valuable resources for achieving a just and peaceful world. Based on this vision, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, co-founder of UPF, initiated the creation of IAPD in 2017. Dr. Moon affirms that humanity has one common Creator, and we are "One human family under God."

Dr. Charles Yang (Regional Chair, UPF-Central America and the Caribbean) pointed out that the UN recognizes the importance of mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue as an essential dimension of a culture of peace and established the first week of February as "World Interfaith Harmony Week." Under the direction of Reverend and Mrs. Moon, UPF conducted the Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) in Israel during a 10-year period. MEPI promoted and strengthened peace between the three religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam: all descendants of the same father, Abraham.

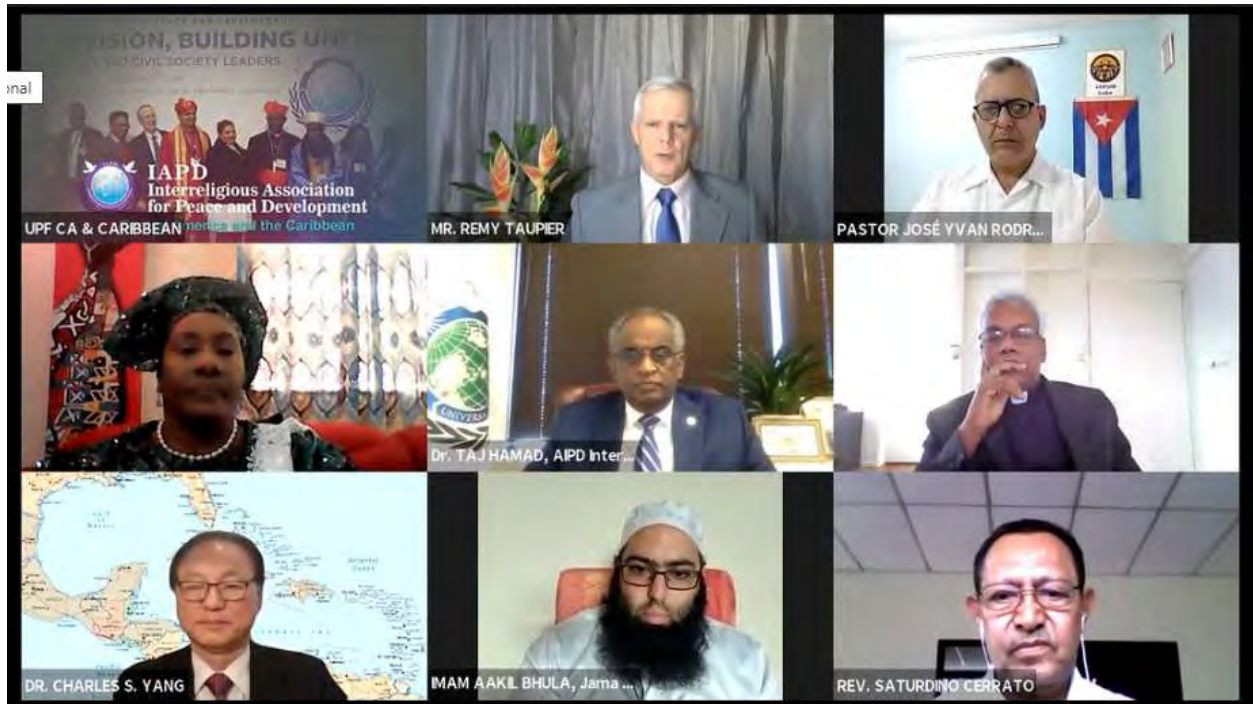
"The message of sustainable development through interfaith harmony is crucial at this most important time that we are now living in," he said. "I welcome and thank our panelists for sharing their ideas with us."

Dr. Taj Hamad (International Coordinator, IAPD) observed that at the UN, everybody knows that there is no peace without development and there is no development without peacebuilding. IAPD calls for the wisdom of religious and faith-based organizations to play a unique and essential role in bringing about a world of lasting peace. It is a world in which people of all races, cultures and religions live together in harmony and cooperation. It is a world that UPF's founders call the Heavenly Parent's Holy community. The ultimate virus to solve conflict and war is love!

Imam Aakil Bhula (Imam, Jama Masjid Mosque, Barbados) explained,
The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Love for Humanity what you love for yourself." (El-Bukhari). This is a golden rule for Islam as well as for most religions. Religion promotes mercy, peace, and love, and these are the characteristics of true believers. We religious leaders must live by these qualities as role models for our congregations. We must preach and stand for justice. Then we can peacefully co-exist in spite of religious, political or any other differences.

Bishop Mary McFarlane (Pastor, Spiritual Baptist Faith, Trinidad and Tobago) said that conflicts, wars, and death start in the mind of humans who look for wealth, fame and selfish gain. She quoted Romans 6:8, which says, "The mind governed by the flesh is death but the mind that is governed by the spirit is life and peace." She added, "We need to have peace education in schools and training for citizens to become skilled in resolving conflict peacefully." She concluded by saying that religious leaders must be pioneers of peacebuilding and agents of change; they must learn to collaborate with each other,

overcoming "peace-blockers." Her final comment was, "We must be our brothers' keepers."



Rev. Saturdino Cerrato (Director, Assembly of God, Nicaragua) stated:

What produces the absence of peace? The absence of peace is due to the lack of justice. What produces the lack of justice? Deuteronomy 6:25 says, "We will have justice when we take care to do all these commandments before Jehovah our God, as he has commanded us."

Religious leaders must lead by example and must remember that "if religion is not pure for the minister, it will not be pure for the people." Addressing the personal and spiritual dimension of the people is very important, if we are to positively influence them. In this we must remember the famous statement of the Mexican who said that "respect for the rights of others is peace." When I respect the rights of others and they respect mine, we will certainly have peaceful relationships.

In this 21st century, we must learn to have tolerance and not be generators of violence.

Rev. Dr. Joseph Raj (Roman Catholic Moral Theologian, Canon Lawyer and Judicial Vicar, St. Lucia) remarked that during his sojourn on earth, the exhortation of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount -- "Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt. 5:9) -- ignites the necessity for all of us to work for peace and to be called sons and daughters of God. He went on to say,

I concur fully with Reverend Sun Myung Moon, who in his book *As a Peace-Loving Global Citizen* states that "loving families can change the world and true love can bring about unification." He says that a peaceful family is the building block of heaven.

If we truly want peace in the world, let us begin by loving one another in our own families. The adage says: "It is better to light a candle, than to curse darkness." It is the responsibility of every leader in the church to teach people to light a candle of peace and love. Just talking about peace or just praying for peace every day is not enough. We need to plunge ourselves into working action for peace.

Pastor Jorge Matarrita (Evangelist, Director, Christian Ministry of Peace, Costa-Rica) eloquently emphasized in his speech that spiritual leaders have a great calling to be builders of peace, using justice as a fundamental and key element in society. He quoted Romans 3:21-23, "There is no peace as long as there is no justice. Justice is achieved through wisdom, patience and the love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," not with a magic formula.

"In seeking peace and development, we must positively influence the attitudes of our parishioners towards social actions that generate efficient development and the creation of opportunities for all," he commented. He affirmed his point with the Bible verse from Isaiah 26:3, "You will keep in perfect peace the steadfast of mind, because he trusts in You."

Pastor José Rodríguez (Pastor, Family Federation for Peace and Unification, Cuba) testified:

When I started to study the loving work of Reverend Moon and his wife, whom I call my True Parents, I changed my entire theological worldview. I realized that I often used my intellect and knowledge of the Bible to divide rather than to bring about peace and unity. I understood that when I look at white or black, poor or rich, Catholics or Protestants, Ashkenazi or Sephardic Jews, Shia or Sunni Muslims, North or South Koreans, Florida or Cuba Cubans, rather than looking at what divides I should look at all the many things we have in common. As leaders of the 21st century, we are challenged to embrace our differences of ideologies, religions, races, and language with the same true and unchanging love that God has for us: This is the only way to achieve universal peace.