

UPF Central America Webinar on The Universal Right to Religious Freedom

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UPF-Central America -- A panel of leaders from the Central America and Caribbean region met in a webinar to discuss the theme: "The Universal Right to Religious Freedom as the Foundation for a World Culture of Peace," on December 10, 2022. The event was sponsored by the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), which is a project of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF).

The moderator, **Rev. Remy Taupier**, the regional coordinator for the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), welcomed the panelists and reminded everyone that, "Religious freedom is a universal right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was adopted by the United Nations in 1945. Article 18 recognizes that 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief.'"



Dr. Charles S. Yang, the chair of the Universal Peace Federation for Central America and the Caribbean, stated in his opening remarks: "It is important to recognize the right to freedom of religion and explain the worrying situation that the Family Federation in Japan is going through and support the initiative of the UPF's Declaration in support of Fundamental Human Rights and Human Dignity, overcoming threats to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. [We are] calling on all leaders in the region to affirm this declaration and uphold the universal right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and strongly oppose all forms of intolerance, prejudice, slander and hatred of others."

Dr. Dennis Petri, founder and scholar-at-large of the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America, said: "A statistical relationship has been established between restrictions on religious freedom

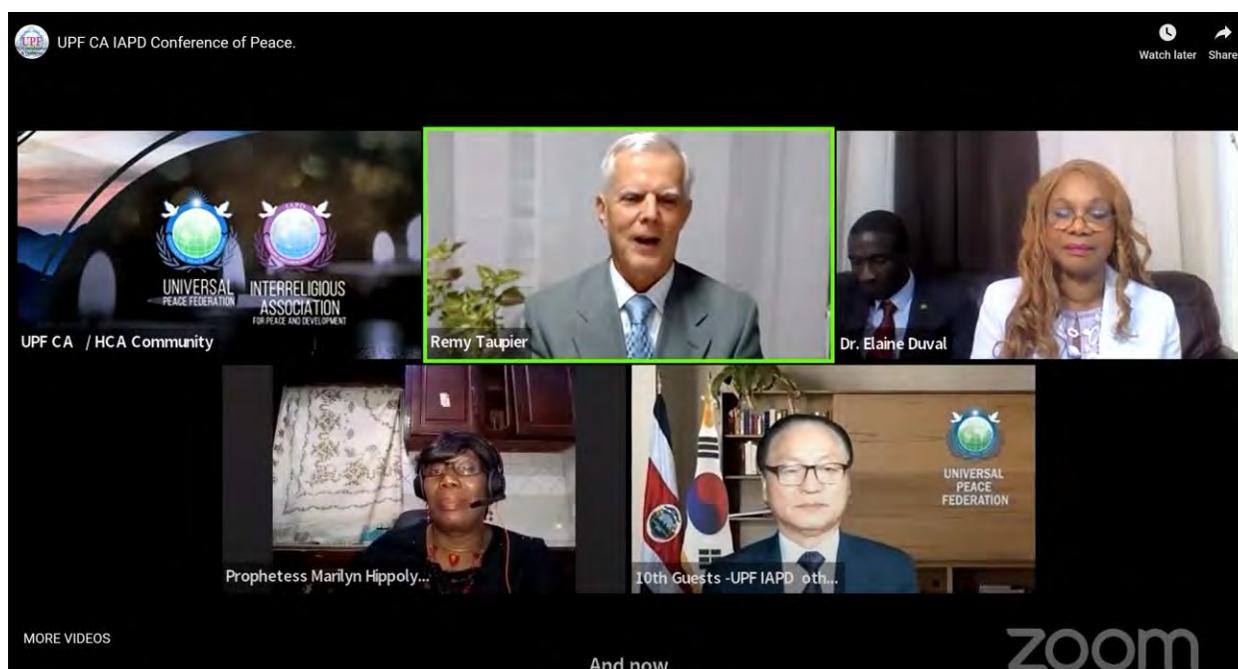
and conflicts of all kinds. If there is a restriction on religious freedom, we understand that it generates discomfort in society, which can later lead to religious conflicts and therefore distance us from the very objective of the peace we want.

"If we want to promote peace in the world, we have a moral imperative to protect religious freedom. Let us remember that 80% of the world's population is religious and in Latin America, it is probably more than 90% of the population, and therefore, the protection of religious freedom also implies taking into account the felt and specific needs of religious groups. Therefore, promoting peace requires the protection of the rights of all religious people and allows us to act in the face of violations of Human Rights against a majority of the population."



The ordained minister, motivational speaker and worship songwriter **Dr. Elaine Duval** said: "Therefore, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is clear that religious liberty or religious freedom is a foundational or fundamental right that should be accorded to every single human being. It determines how we structure and live our lives, both internally and externally, both vertically and horizontally.

"Religion then is at the core of who we are as human beings who are a composite of divine and human elements, and who need to communicate and commune with the divine source of our beings, who is God, the Creator of all.



"Religious liberty thus becomes an inviolable individual right to exercise direct communication/communion with God. Ultimately, the interreligious leaders (consisting of religious leaders of all faiths as well as faith-based organizations globally), will function as God's instruments of peace to usher in the Providence of Restoration, and help to fulfill the Messianic mission of bringing about what the Gospel of Luke declares as 'peace on earth and goodwill to all men.'"

The next speaker, **Mr. Arturo Pozo**, a Zen Buddhist monk who teaches Buddhism at the Pontifical University of Mexico, said: "It would be convenient to reflect on peace starting from its opposite, which is war. War also exists out there among the privileged ones who are not under a warlike conflict. It is found daily within us; that is, we have internal wars of various levels of intensity that can range from worry to depression, through anger, greed and fear. All this represents the incubation of violence."



"In this sense, we, people of intuition of different religious traditions, what did we do to check ourselves and others concerning religious tolerance?"

Prophetess Marilyn Hippolyte, of Greater Works International and president of Women Empowerment Ministries, commented: "We came to show Jesus' heart... As the Bible says in Galatians 3:28, there is no Jew, no Greek, no slave, no free. Under the umbrella of universal, we have to embrace the diversity."

"I have to love you in spite of who you are and where you came from. Why? Because the love of God is demonstrated in your hearts. You have gifts and skills that differ from mine. With that understanding, there is no competition, no contest, but just the embracing of one another and the harmony and peace we seek. As we do this, we can eliminate the crime, the hate and the bitterness in our nations."

Rev. Dennis Salmon, the regional coordinator of the International Association of Arts and Cultural for Peace (IACCP), gave the closing remarks and offered these words: "Peace is undeniably the highest value of our age. Reverend Moon teaches that peace becomes possible when we acknowledge the existence of other peoples, nations and cultures, that is, when we do not ostracize but accept and embrace people who are different from us as part of 'One family under God.'"

