

## UPF Central America and the Caribbean: The Importance of Religious Freedom

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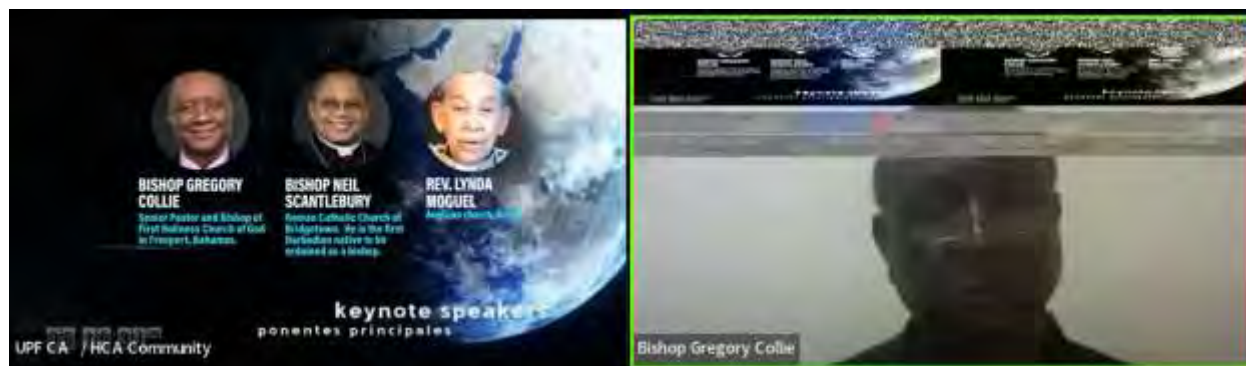
**Central America** -- On March 21, 2023, a panel of leaders from the Central America and Caribbean region met in a webinar to discuss the theme: "The Importance of Religious Freedom for a Peaceful World." It was sponsored by the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) which is a project of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF).



**REV. REMY TAUPIER**, the regional coordinator for the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), was the moderator. He welcomed the panelists and reminded them 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, couldn't participate because of illness but the moderator read the opening remarks on his behalf. UPF affirms that any successful strategy for peace must take into account the spiritual dimension of our human identity, experience and interactions. Due to their moral authority and emphasis on human rights based on the principle that we have one common Creator and that we are "one human family under God," religious leaders can help rebuild divided societies and assist in humanitarian services for the alleviation of hunger, disease and trauma due to violence and war. The world's religions and faith-based organizations can provide a unique set of valuable resources for achieving a just and peaceful world.

Among other projects, IAPD supports the Peaceful Reunification of North and South Korea and the Middle East Peace Initiative for peace between Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths.



### Special Panelists

**BISHOP GREGORY COLLIE**, Senior Pastor and Bishop of First Holiness Church of God in Freeport, Bahamas.

Bishop Collie remarked that governments must recognize the diversity of religions in society. The United States, the Bahamas, and Caribbean countries have provisions in their constitutions that protect religious freedom and prohibit discrimination based on religious belief.

Freedom can be defined as the power or right to act, speak or think as one wants.

Bishop Collie concluded by quoting John Leland, a Baptist minister who helped secure freedom of religion in the American constitution: "Let every man speak freely without fear -- maintain the principles that he believes -- worship according to his own faith, either one God, three Gods, no God, or twenty Gods; and let government protect him in so doing, i.e., see that he meets with no personal abuse or loss of property for his religious opinion."



**BISHOP NEIL SCANTLEBURY** of the Roman Catholic Church of Bridgetown, in Barbados.

Bishop Scantlebury was the first native Barbadian to be ordained as a bishop. He acknowledged that religious freedom is an essential requirement of human dignity and personal fulfillment, and the foundation of human rights. It means that if people are not free to express and live their religious beliefs, it leads to restlessness and discontent, which can cause disruption and conflict.

He emphasized that religion should lead people towards a loving relationship with God, themselves, others and creation, which is natural peace-building.

Bishop Scantlebury concluded with St. Francis of Assisi's famous prayer: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon ..."

**EV. LYNDA MOGUEL** of the St. Steven Anglican Church of Flowers Bank, Belize.

Rev. Moguel stated: "In Exeter, England as a student, I was housed with Mary and David, of the Church

of England and regular worshippers in the church. I could not have asked for more kindness. I was embraced into an experience of total oneness with children of God."

As a teacher, she remembered: "I gained teaching experience in different religious settings. The freedom to worship our God could be seen as different in practices but felt the same spiritually."

Later in the United States at Kentucky University, she experienced various religious settings, even working for a Muslim lady, taking care of her two children. "Different religions did not matter. We did share and care and exercised kindness and gentleness. Surely the spirit of the Lord was in these places." She concluded: "For peace in the world, we need to seek to understand the differences, respect them and see the depth of how people of different faiths, cultures and languages can walk with God in their corner of the world."

**PASTOR JOSE IVAN**, Vice-President of the Family Federation for World Peace in Cuba.



In his remarks, Pastor Ivan stated that Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the Mother of Peace, has expressed that peace begins within each one of us. The Bible teaches that where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Article 18 of the UN human rights declaration demands respect for this right to freedom of faith, belief and religious practice.

National institutions must respect freedom of religion in the family. Religious freedom starts from the individual's desire and attitude to respect differences and to unite on common ground by lowering the barriers we have established in our minds, families, communities and institutions.

We must promote dialogue and understanding by practicing true love, forgiveness and mercy as principles that lead us to true Peace and the end of wars. Misery and human suffering will be eradicated when each one of us determines to live for the good of others, love God and love our neighbor.

**PASTOR FRAKLYN NOEL**, Evangelist at Noah's Ark ministries in San Juan, Trinidad.

**APOSTOL SANDRA CALZASCIA**, President-founder of the International Foundation Amor de Dios, House of God and Gate of Heaven.

"My thanks to the promoters of such a great event and I want to greet each one of the ministers who are present here tonight. I think we know and understand that we are living in difficult times and that we are experiencing great conflicts between many nations and many peoples. Today many of us are professing peace and love that we are not practicing. I speak as a member of the church of Christ and I think we should make more effort to want to live in peace and in love with our brothers in Christ and with those who are not yet of Christ. In other words, we have to seek to promulgate peace and make effort to practice and live it. Salvation is not achieved by the nation, the individual or religion, but only and exclusively through Christ by his sacrifice on the cross."